# THE LIGHTER SIDE OF IRISH LIFE

by George A. Birmingham

ILLUSTRATED BY Henry W. Kerr, R.S.A.

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THE LIGHTER SIDE OF IRISH LIFE

ST. PATRICK'S DAY IN THE MORNING

# THE LIGHTER SIDE OF IRISH LIFE

BY GEORGE A. BIRMINGHAM

AUTHOR OF "THE SEETHING POT" "SPANISH GOLD"

WITH SIXTEEN ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOUR

BY HENRY W. KERR, R.S.A.

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## NOTE BY PUBLISHER

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*I sit in my cabin, sure takin me aise,*
*Wid me ould comrade near, contint as ye plase;*
*A pig or two running about on the floor:*
*Bad cess to the Omadhaun askin for more.*

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# CHAPTER ONE

## AS OTHERS SEE US

## CHAP. ONE AS OTHERS SEE US

MR. W. B. YEATS, WHO IS A WIT AS WELL as a poet, once found himself called upon to discuss the opinion which the English people have formed of the Irish. "They insist," he said, "in presenting us with all the good qualities which they do not want for themselves. For instance, they will have it that we are an island of saints." The saying is two-edged, cutting deep into the self-satisfaction of English and Irish alike. For the English, so Mr. Yeats seems to think, admire saintliness only in other peoples, while the Irish, so he went on to explain, have a glory thrust on them which they by no means deserve. I am not sure that Mr. Yeats' example is the best he could have chosen. I seldom meet English people who insist much on our saintliness. They are more inclined to credit us with a kind of non-moral Puckishness of nature, a mischievous irresponsibility for which they do not blame us, though they find it inconvenient. But Mr. Yeats' general principle is quite unassailable. The English are always most generous in endowing us with amiable characteristics which they do not care to

claim for themselves. I happened once to be an interested listener to a conversation between two Englishmen on the weary subject of Home Rule. They thrashed the matter out very thoroughly, and then one of them closed the discussion with these profound remarks: "What I say is that the Irish are a sentimental people. They are quite easy to deal with so long as you tickle their feelings. Give them leave to fly a green flag over the Parliament House in College Green and they won't care a pin whether they have a real Parliament or not. I know all about it, because there are a lot of Irish in my constituency." This particular Englishman was a member of Parliament—"And I always wear a bit of shamrock on St. Patrick's Day. It doesn't do me any harm and it goes down like anything with them." There is Mr. Yeats' principle illustrated from life. That Englishman was one of those who pride themselves on taking a hard-headed, strictly utilitarian view of life. Sentimentalism seemed to him an amiable kind of weakness, pardonable, indeed very admirable, in wives, daughters, and people of inferior races. He had no use for it himself, so

he handed it on to us. In the same way the ordinary Englishman will have it that we are a gay and irresponsible people who take little thought for the future and are ever ready to prance through the mazes of life to merry jig tunes. He is conscious of a certain intellectual stiffness in himself. He has accepted the strong, silent man of the later Victorian novelists as a national ideal. Reckless gaiety is a quality which does not fit in with strong silentness, therefore he makes it over to us. He admires irresponsibility in children and girls who are quite young and very pretty. It gives them a kittenish attractiveness. Having decided that we Irish are irresponsible, he is quite prepared to like us in a patronising way, just as he likes children and pretty girls. In the same spirit he has endowed us with conversational eloquence as a national characteristic. He does not want to be agreeable himself and rather prides himself on a certain severe aloofness of manners. But somebody in the world ought to talk sparklingly, so he decides that the Irish have a capacity for such conversation born in them.

Thus a mythical Irishman has come into being, a sentimentalist at heart, a creature of irresponsible gaiety, of singular and irresistible charm of manner, of spontaneous brilliance, a light lover of every pretty woman, or in cases where he happens himself to be a woman, a careless winner of the hearts of men. It is small wonder that the Irish are popular with writers of fiction. We supply for the novelist a long-felt want, and are fitted to play in his stories just those parts which throw into the strongest relief the stable worthiness of the ideal, and, I fear, equally mythical, Englishman. The reader of contemporary fiction can hardly fail to be struck with the fact that a dash of Irish blood in her veins is now considered necessary as an explanation of the charm of a heroine, that true gallantry in a hero can only be rendered credible by providing him with at least a great-grandmother who belonged to an old Irish family. This myth about the Irish character is of comparatively recent growth. The older novelists knew nothing of it. They either despised us too much to put us into their books at all, or else disliked us and represented us unkindly.

The change, from our point of view, is all to the good. It is always pleasant to be praised, even for qualities which we do not possess. But such praise has one drawback. We are expected to live up to our imagined character, and this is sometimes very hard to do. I happened once to spend some time, the length of a long dinner to be particular, in the company of a very pleasant English lady. Just before the custom of such occasions separated us she discovered my nationality. "But surely," she said, "you are not really an Irishman. I should never have guessed it." I pressed for an explanation of her remark. She hesitated for a while, and then confessed, "You haven't talked like an Irishman. You haven't said a really Irish thing to me all the evening. And—and—you don't behave like an Irishman." I felt severely snubbed. I ought to have been brilliant. I had evidently been dull. I ought to have talked scintillating nonsense. I had, I suppose, been monotonously sane. I ought, perhaps at intervals, to have oozed with Celtic glamour or sighed out something of the mysterious melancholy of a vanquished race. As for my behaviour, I won-

dered, uncomfortably, after she had left me, what she expected from an Irishman. Perhaps I ought to have gazed into her eyes with a mixture of merriment and admiration in mine. I had done nothing of the sort, and my lady, whom I genuinely liked, left me disillusioned and sad. The real Irishman, when at last she met him, by no means came up to the figure of the myth.

Another Irishman had an even bitterer experience of his inability to live up to what the English expected of him. He was staying in a country vicarage somewhere in the English midlands. It happened that the vicar was organising a parochial entertainment for the benefit of his Friendly Girls, his United Mothers, or some other excellent band of people. He asked his Irish guest to contribute an item to the programme of the evening. The Irishman could not sing, play the fiddle, or dance, but he was anxious to be obliging. He said he would try to recite. Realising that his audience was to consist of entirely English people, he made up his mind to eschew all Irish poetry and give them something of their own, something that would appeal to their national feelings and

A CLADDAGH FISHERMAN

arouse that sense of patriotism to which their pageants and music-hall songs successfully appealed. At the same time, the entertainment being under the patronage of the vicar, he felt it right to give something of an elevating and ennobling kind. Tennyson's "Ballad of the Revenge" struck him as exactly what he wanted. He spent two days laboriously in learning the whole poem off by heart. He went out to a lonely field and practised the management of his voice. He stood for hours in front of the looking-glass working up appropriate gestures. There was a very large audience in the parochial hall. The vicar announced each item of the programme and introduced each performer. When he came to his guest he spoke handsomely, though untruthfully, of him, as a distinguished Irishman. The audience cheered. The vicar repeated "distinguished Irishman" and added something about "the smile and the tear in Erin's eye." The audience began to laugh. The reciter stood up. The audience laughed still more heartily. He began:

"At Flores in the Azores Sir Richard Grenville lay."

The audience laughed louder than ever. He

went on to the "men of Bideford in Devon." Every man, woman, and child in the hall rocked in their seats with uncontrollable merriment. The reciter made a desperate effort to rally them with the "thumbscrew and the rack and the devildom of Spain." Their mirth became uproarious. He began to realise that, having been announced as an Irishman, he was expected to be funny. All Irishmen are comic. He had no right to attempt to be serious. He was, as has already appeared, a man of kindly and obliging disposition. He accommodated himself to the expectation of the audience and gave the rest of the poem in his best brogue. When he came to the final sinking of the "little Revenge" he danced a few steps of an Irish reel and left the stage amid a perfect tumult of applause. For such indignities we have to thank those writers who have created the myth of the comic Irishman.

Of course the greater novelists know us better and took no part in the creation of the myth which flatters and embarrasses us. Thackeray, for instance, heartily disliked us, but he was never guilty of representing us as sentimental-

ists or professional buffoons. When he set himself to depict Miss Costigan, the fair Fotheringay, afterwards Lady Mirabel, he had every opportunity of giving us an Irishwoman of quite the mythical kind. Here was a young woman of great personal beauty. What was easier than to endow her with "Irish" charm? She is an actress, therefore should have been Bohemian by instinct and temperamentally irresponsible. Being Irish it seems obvious that she should have been both in the highest degree. Beneath her airy charm, if she had it, and her reckless gaiety there might well have lurked a fundamental sentimentality. But Thackeray represents the lady quite differently. His Miss Costigan is a singularly clear-headed young woman with a very acute perception of her own interests. Devoid to the point of actual stupidity of all charm except such as her pretty face gave her, with an instinctive appreciation of the advantages of respectability, and entirely inaccessible to sentimental emotion, Miss Costigan is certainly remote enough from the real Irishwoman, but at least she has no share in building up the myth of the later novelists. Thackeray,

in *Vanity Fair*, drew for us an Irish soldier. We meet him first as Major O'Dowd; and knowing what an Irish soldier in fiction usually is, we expect perhaps a dashing light dragoon, a man of reckless daring, retrieving blunders with impossible victories, a little too much inclined to "love and ride away." We get instead a sober, somewhat dull man, monotonously faithful to a middle-aged wife of no great attractiveness, who pushes his way to the front of his profession by a steady devotion to duty. Thackeray's gay and gallant soldier is young Osborne, the son of an English city merchant. His sentimentalist, the ultimate possible refinement of sentimentality, is Dobbin, another Englishman. Mrs. Major O'Dowd has none of the characteristics we are accustomed to associate with Irish women in fiction. She is no more sentimental than Miss Fotheringay, and the last failing of which any one can accuse her is indifference to the claims of common sense. She is an embodiment of practical good-heartedness. Contrast her behaviour with that of the other women, the English women, on the morning of Quatre Bras. Amelia Osborne goes into hysterics. Becky

waves a gay farewell to her husband and then very selfishly makes the best of the situation for herself, sewing her valuables into her stays. Lady Bareacres is panic-stricken. Mrs. O' Dowd, after sending her warrior forth with a comfortable cup of coffee in his stomach, awaits events with a perfect readiness to do such helpful work as comes to hand. Nothing could well be remoter from the Irish woman of the myth than the character of Mrs. O'Dowd. So we might go on through Thackeray's Irish characters. He viewed us with eyes which were far from friendly, but which were clear enough to see that we are neither sentimentalists nor the official jesters of the United Kingdom. I once had the privilege of meeting a clever Englishwoman who had lived for some months in Dublin. She gave as her impression of Irishmen: "What has struck me most forcibly about you," she said, "is that your men never fall in love." The judgment was too sweeping, of course; but it was singularly refreshing. She had risen superior to the vulgar myth. She may have come over expecting to find every man she met violently in love with a different woman every day.

Her disappointment, if it were a disappointment, roused in her an iconoclastic fury. She wanted utterly to destroy the idol she had once believed in. She refused to credit us with any capacity for falling in love. In reality we fall in love occasionally, though not so frequently as Englishmen do. In Ireland, if you fall in love twice and want to be off with the old love in order to go on with the new, you have to get an Act of Parliament specially passed to give you your divorce. This shows how much truth there was in that lady's judgment. For the law would certainly accommodate itself to our customs if repeated falling in love were a national pastime.

Very few, curiously few, of the greater novelists have made deliberate, first-hand studies of Irishmen. Thackeray did, but leaving him we must leap on to Stevenson. Being a Scot he was slightly more sympathetic than Thackeray, but not a bit more inclined to accept the conventional Irishman as real. In *The Master of Ballantrae* he gives us a portrait, drawn with extraordinary firmness of line, of an Irishman of what ought to be the most romantic type. Colonel Burke was one of "The Wild Geese" or the son of one

of them. He belongs to that exiled Jacobite aristocracy of Ireland whose woes and whose glories our poets have sung. He is one of those

> "Men of a thousand wrongs,
> War dogs battered and grey
> Gnawing a naked bone;
> Fighters in every clime,
> In every cause but their own."

He ought to be a very figure of romance. Stevenson drops some testing acid upon the gilt of him and displays very common metal underneath. Colonel Burke is a man of the same type exactly as Alan Breck Stuart in *Kidnapped*. But Alan Breck had the advantage of being a Scot. Stevenson laughs at him, but laughs kindly. For poor Colonel Burke he has little but contempt. The man is not even superlatively brave. He dwells in our memories chiefly as "Crowding Pat," and his disregard of common morality makes a poor show beside the commanding villainy of the Master himself. The truth is that Stevenson delighted in showing the seamy side of the Jacobite loyalty which Scott glorified, and he gives his imagination free play when his victim happens to be an Irishman of the romantic kind. But for another

sort of Irishman Stevenson had a real love. Towards the end of *The Wrecker*, in the course of Carthew's narrative, he introduces us to an Ulster Irishman, whom he calls Mac. The man is lightly sketched, but in almost every characteristic he displays he is true to his type. He knocks an unfortunate Australian down for calling him an Irishman.

"But you are an Irishman, aren't you?" says Carthew to him in surprise.

"I may be," says Mac, "but I'll allow no Sydney duck to call me so."

Twenty years ago most of the inhabitants of that north-east corner of Ireland, which has succeeded in impressing the world with the idea that it is Ulster, would have felt, and probably acted, just as Mac did. Since then there has been a change, and these northern men are beginning to acknowledge the fact that they are Irish, though, of course, Irishmen of a most superior kind. Very soon, if they go on as they are going, they will believe, and, being men of great force of character, will force everybody else to believe, that they are the only genuine Irishmen, the rest of the people who dwell in

the island being mere Gibeonites, strangers by descent and only fit to be hewers of wood and drawers of water for the dominant race. The fact is that Mac would have knocked down his "Sydney duck" quite as promptly if that poor man had ventured to call him English, Scottish, or Welsh. On Medway Island, when the castaways are sitting round their camp fire, Mac flings a concertina into the fire because the owner of it will play "Home, Sweet Home"; and sentimental ditties are singularly abhorrent to Ulstermen. They tend to arouse emotions which no Ulsterman can feel without loss of self-respect. After the butchery of the crew of *The Flying Scud* he asks his comrades' pardon for having led them into a scrape, and proposes, with childlike simplicity, that they should say the Lord's Prayer together. "We're all Protestants here, I hope," he says. They were in fact all murderers, but the true Ulsterman makes a distinction among murderers. There are those who are Protestants, culpable of course, but not altogether beyond the pale of decent society. There are also those who are not Protestants, and with them he would not have cared to as-

sociate even on the blood-stained deck of *The Flying Scud.*

Stevenson must have known some of those Ulstermen very well, and in nothing is he more faithful to the type than in his hint of the extraordinary vigour of Mac's Protestantism. There is a thoughtful boy in an Antrim village who listened one Sunday to a statement made by his Sunday-school teacher that God had created all things and all men. "Did God," he asked at last, "make the Papists?" He had been taught to reverence the Almighty, and it seemed impossible that He could have been guilty of that. The teacher assured him that God had really made even them. The boy pondered the information for a minute, and then gave his opinion briefly but forcibly. "He'll rue it yet," he said. I have very vividly in my memory a scene which I once witnessed. An old man, whiteheaded, full of benevolence, a man of character and culture, one who, in his day, had been a leader of men and had wielded great power, sat in a room in Belfast with a little boy on his knee. The child could barely speak, and must have been absolutely ignorant of the meaning of the words

he lisped. The old man was teaching him to say: "No Pope. No Priest. No Surrender. Hurrah!"

The present Primate of All Ireland quoted in the course of a speech another schoolboy's essay in which the following statement occurred: "There are no wild beasts in Ireland now except in theological gardens." That child had hit accidentally upon a profound truth. Stevenson illustrated it in his delicately touched portrait of Mac. The Antrim boy who prophesied a tardy repentance for the Almighty, will probably grow to be a peaceful citizen, but only if he can be kept out of "theological gardens." The other babe will carry to his grave the effect of his first experience of the wild beasts of Ireland; but he may, in spite of the marks of the claws on him, be a useful citizen.

The only other first-rate English-writing novelist who has attempted a detailed study of Irishmen is Meredith. We must hold him responsible, in part at least, for the common belief in Irish brilliance and Irish inclination to romance. It is since the publication of *Diana of the Crossways* that the myth has been gener-

ally accepted. It will be more prevalent, I fear, when our contemporary novelists find time to study the unfinished *Celt and Saxon.* In it we have, superbly described of course, Irishmen of a highly conventionalised kind. The O'Donnells, the uncle Con and his two nephews, belong to the Irish aristocracy, to that older aristocracy of which Stevenson's Colonel Burke was an unworthy representative. They are brilliant, highly emotional, splendidly chivalrous towards women, and touched with a curious feeling of patriotism which is half contemptuous of the country it entirely loves. It has been said that an Englishman loves his country as if she were his wedded wife, a Frenchman as if she were his mistress, a German as if she were his old mother knitting at the fireside. We might add another comparison and say that the Irishman loves his country as if she were the image of a saint beside the altar. His devotion is duly paid with all the reverence of a faithful man, but there lurks somewhere at the back of his mind a doubt whether the marble figure is a supreme example of the sculptor's art. He will criticise while he worships ; will criticise even

his own prayers, and all the more because he doubts his right to criticise.

Irish men and women of the kind which Meredith describes exist. Otherwise he would not have drawn them. But they are rare; occasional flowers of a national life brought to maturity by an accidental combination of exceptional circumstances. They cannot be taken as normal examples of Irish character. Their splendour in the pages of the great novelist is to some extent at least the cause of the prevalence in contemporary fiction of the conventionally brilliant, charming, sentimental, irresponsible Irishman with whom we are all probably too familiar.

To see ourselves as others see us is supposed to be an inestimable boon. Burns, at all events, thought it worth praying for; though, even in the case of the lady for whom he wished it, we may fairly argue that she was better without it. She appears to have been saying her prayers in comfortable unconsciousness when the poet meditated on her case. She was surely more profitably occupied than she would have been in pursuing an insect among the trimmings of her bonnet. But she would, if Burns' prayer had

been granted, at least have got at a solid fact. The loathsome creature was certainly there. It is doubtful whether we Irish gain anything by seeing ourselves as our neighbours across the Irish Sea have learned to see us. Thackeray's view of us is too unsympathetic to be convincing. Stevenson, who saw Mac clearly enough, failed to realise the greatness of our Jacobite aristocracy, a greatness which our own poets have sung very beautifully. Meredith took a rare type and idealised it. The Irishman of the common contemporary myth is quite strange to us. We find in him no trait which is recognisably ours.

# CHAPTER TWO

## AS WE SEE OURSELVES—OLD IRELAND

## CHAPTER TWO AS WE SEE OURSELVES : OLD IRELAND

THE HISTORY OF IRELAND BROKE OFF abruptly and made a fresh start in the middle of the nineteenth century. The famine of 1846, '47, and '48 saw the end of one Ireland. The years which followed it have witnessed the painful struggling to the birth of another. The very type of our faces changed. We must, I suppose, believe the artists and caricaturists that the short-headed, snub-nosed, prognathous Irishman was common in the early part of the nineteenth century. He lingers on still in the English comic papers. From Ireland itself he has disappeared. The fact was pointed out to me by an old friend. "When I was young," he said, "*Punch* used to represent Irishmen as baboons in knee-breeches and swallow-tailed coats ; and the kind of face which *Punch* exaggerated was to be seen in every fair and gathering of the people. I hardly ever see it now." I offer no explanation of the change, but the fact is plain. The type of Irish face which could be caricatured into the semblance of a baboon has vanished even more completely than the

picturesque dress which the Irish peasant used to wear. You may still see the swallow-tailed coat, chimney-pot hat, and tight knee-breeches on some old man at a wayside railway station. The face which used to be the prevailing type you see no more. And with the face has gone a certain kind of character.

Lever's novels depict for us the old hard-drinking, hard-riding, hard-fighting, reckless Irishman. He had his day, but it is over now. The famine years killed him off. Those of his class who survived the famine were anachronisms even in the twenty years from 1850 to 1870, No such people live in Ireland now. The town of Mallow is no longer famous for its "rakes." The very word has disappeared from common use.

"Bearing, belling, dancing, drinking,
Breaking windows, damning, sinking,
Ever raking, never thinking,
Live the Rakes of Mallow.

Spending faster than it comes,
Beating waiters, bailiffs, duns,
Bacchus' true begotten sons,
Live the Rakes of Mallow.

Racking tenants, stewards teasing,
Swiftly spending, slowly raising,
Wishing to spend all their days in
Raking as at Mallow."

There is no such society in Ireland now, nor has been for half a century. Mallow depends for its fame to-day, not on its "rakes," but on the fact of its special connection with a very serious-minded politician, a gentleman whose worst enemies would hesitate to suggest that he was "Bacchus' true begotten son." But we have plenty of evidence that such a society really did exist in Ireland from the middle of the eighteenth century, perhaps earlier, up to the middle of the nineteenth century. Sir Jonah Barrington's *Personal Studies and Sketches*, a book far less known than it ought to be, abounds in true stories of the prototypes of "The Rakes of Mallow." A pair of hard-drinking squires went to sleep one night, after their potations, with their heads leaning against a wall which had recently been given a coat of mortar. During the night the mortar dried, and in the morning Messrs. Joe Kelly and Peter Alley were discovered by their friends fast anchored by their hair and scalps. A consultation followed as to what had better be done in so painful a case. Mr. Peter Alley, growing impatient, released himself thus: "He asked

for two knives, which being brought, he whetted one against the other, and introducing the blades close to his skull, sawed away at cross corners till he was liberated, with the loss only of half his hair and a piece of his scalp, which he had sliced off in zeal and haste for his liberty. I never saw a fellow so extravagantly happy! Fur was scraped from the crown of a hat to stop the bleeding, and he was duly tied up with an old woman's *praskeen* (an apron). He was soon in a state of bodily convalescence. Our solicitude was now required solely for Joe, whose head was too deeply buried to be exhumated with so much facility. At this moment Bob Casey, of Ballinakill, a very celebrated wigmaker, just dropped in to see what he could pick up honestly in the way of his profession or steal in the way of anything else; and he immediately undertook to get Mr. Kelly out of the mortar by a very expert but tedious process, namely, clipping with his scissors, and then rooting out with an oyster knife. He thus finally succeeded in less than an hour in setting Joe once more at liberty, at the price of his queue, which was totally lost, and of the exposure

of his raw and bleeding occiput. The operation was, indeed, of a mongrel description—somewhat between a complete tonsure and an imperfect scalping, to both of which denominations it certainly presented claims."

Debt was, apparently, as common as whisky, and the weight of obligations which he could not hope to discharge was carried light-heartedly by the Irish gentleman. A certain Mr. Tom Flinter who lived in the neighbourhood of Timahoe enjoyed himself until his household was reduced to one faithful retainer, Dick Hennessy by name. This man seems to have had some feeling for common honesty, and it should be noted to his master's credit that Dick's good advice was not wholly wasted. Mr. Flinter came into some money unexpectedly. He proposed to enjoy a "burst" at Timahoe fair. The conversation between him and Hennessy is thus related by a poet.

*Tom Flinter.* "Dick," says he,
*Dick Hennessy.* "What," says he.
*Tom Flinter.* "Fetch me my hat," says he,
"For I will go," says he,
"To Timahoe," says he;
"I'll buy the fair," says he,
"And all that's there," says he.

*Dick Hennessy.* "Arrah, pay what you owe," says he;
"And then you may go," says he,
"To Timahoe," says he,
"To buy the fair," says he,
"And all that's there," says he.

*Tom Flinter.* "Well, by this and by that," says he;
"Dick, *hang up my hat*," says he.

But, though improvidence was common, a very "canny" appreciation of the value of possessions was not unknown. There was a certain Elizabeth Fitzgerald who, indeed, belonged to rather an earlier period, being the great-aunt of Sir Jonah. It happened that she was besieged in her Castle by a large but ill-armed body of O'Cahills. Mistress Fitzgerald was well able to take care of her property, but her husband seems to have been a fool. He strayed from the safety of the Castle and was captured by the enemy. They sent a messenger to the lady, who conducted the prisoner to a place well within his wife's sight. "I'm a truce, lady," said the O'Cahill herald. "Look here" (showing the terrified squire), "we have your husband in hault—yees have yeer Castle *sure* enough. Now, we'll change, if you please: we'll render the squire and you'll render the keep;

and if yees won't do that same the squire will be throttled before your two eyes in half an hour."

"Flag of truce!" said the heroine with due dignity and without hesitation; "mark the words of Elizabeth Fitzgerald of Moret Castle; they may serve for your own wife upon some future occasion. Flag of truce! I *won't* render my keep, and I'll tell you why—Elizabeth Fitzgerald may get another husband, but Elizabeth Fitzgerald may never get another Castle; so I'll keep what I have; and if you can't get off faster than your legs can readily carry you, my warders will try which is hardest, your skull or a stone bullet."

The O'Cahills kept their word, and old Squire Stephen Fitzgerald in a short time was seen dangling and performing various evolutions in the air.

It is easy to condemn the wild excesses of such a society. It is perhaps less easy to see its merits. But it had some merits. Its wildly bacchanalian songs had a certain literary flavour of their own. The men who wrote or sang them were hard drinkers no doubt, but

they were not ignorant boors. We drink less nowadays, which is clear gain. We look after our shillings and pence—so our savings bank statistics witness—but we are no longer capable of the fine abandon of the man who wrote "Bumper, Squire Jones."

"Ye good fellows all,
Who love to be told where good claret's in store.
Attend to the call
Of one who's ne'er frighted,
But greatly delighted,
With six bottles more:
Be sure you don't pass
The good hiuse Money-Glass,
Which the jolly red god so peculiarly owns;
'Twill well suit your humour,
For pray what would you more
Than mirth, with good claret, and bumpers, Squire Jones?

"Ye lovers who pine
For lasses that oft prove as cruel as fair,
Who whimper and whine
For lilies and roses,
With eyes, lips and noses,
Or tip of an ear.
Come hither, I'll show you
How Phillis and Chloe
No more shall occasion such sighs and such groans:
For what mortal so stupid
As not to quit Cupid,
When called by good claret and bumpers, Squire Jones?"

So the song rants on for another six stanzas. The poets are appealed to—

"Our jingling of glasses
Your rhyming surpasses."

Soldiers are invited to the revel. The clergy "so wise" have the right hand of bacchanalian fellowship extended to them. Even lawyers, the natural enemies of Squire Jones and his like, are exhorted to

"Leave musty reports
And forsake the king's courts,
Where dullness and discord have set up their thrones."

Doctors are apostrophised as "Ye physical tribe," and foxhunters, surely not in vain, are urged to

"Hark away to the claret—a bumper, Squire Jones."

In such a society it is scarcely to be wondered at that the father of Lever's most famous hero was obliged to leave Dublin in a hearse to escape the attention of his creditors; or that a west of Ireland gentleman advertising for a tenant for his country house should have quoted as one of its chief attractions that there was not an attorney within twenty miles of it in any direction. Such a paradise for insolvent debtors can-

not, one would suppose, have remained long unlet.

These were the gentry, the descendants of the Cromwellian Puritans, who ousted the old Jacobite aristocracy. But their spirit was the spirit of all classes. Micky Free was as convivial and as reckless as his master. There is a Dublin street ballad, "The Night before Larry was Stretched," which witnesses to just the same spirit in the very dregs of society. Larry was to be hanged in the morning. "Stretched" is a euphemism for the extreme vengeance of the law. His friends joined him the night before in a final merry-making.

> "The boys they came crowding in fast,
> They drew all their stools round about him,
> Six glasses round his trap case were placed,
> He couldn't be well waked without 'em.
> When one of us asked could he die
> Without having duly repented?
> Says Larry, 'That's all in my eye;
> And first by the clergy invented,
> To get a fat bit for themselves.'"

Larry was horribly blasphemous. Nobody is ever blasphemous now, which shows how much Ireland has improved since the days when the clergy drank with a cheery good-fellowship, and

wore white chokers round their necks instead of collars as stiffly starched as their theology!

Such a society could not possibly survive. It is gone now, and no more than the tradition of its reckless *joie de vivre* remains. Squire Jones' descendants, if they drink at all, do it shamefacedly and timidly, being aware of the unpleasant effects of excess upon the liver. Our contemporary Larrys are very rarely hanged. They have a proper respect for their clergy nowadays, and the blamelessness of their lives goes to make good the boast of the politicians that Ireland is the most crimeless part of the United Kingdom.

Those were the days of the famous faction fights, feuds often without any discoverable cause which resulted in pitched battles at fairs and markets. Tipperary was of all the Irish counties the richest in faction and produced the fiercest battles ; but they were common all over Ireland. Inglis, in his *Irish Tour*, gives an account of a scrimmage which he witnessed in western Galway between the Joyces and the Connemara boys. The combatants fought with sticks, the well-known Irish shillelaghs. The

traveller, who seems to have been a man of insatiable curiosity, attended a "Pattern"—a species of holiday festival—and was invited into a tent where poteen-drinking was in full swing.

"By and by," he writes, "some boastful expression of a Joyce appeared to give offence to several at the far end of the tent; and something loud and contentious was spoken of by two or three in a breath. The language, which, in compliment to me, had been English, suddenly changed to Irish. Two or three glasses of poteen were quickly gulped by most of the boys, and the innkeeper, who had accompanied me and who sat by me, whispered that there would soon be some fighting. I had seen abundance of fighting on a small scale in Ireland, but, I confess, I had been barbarous enough to wish I might see a regular faction fight; and now I was likely to be gratified. Taking the hint of the innkeeper, I shook hands with the 'boys' nearest to me right and left; and, taking advantage of a sudden burst of voices, I stepped over my bench, and retiring from my tent, took up a safe position on some neighbouring rocks.

"I had not long to wait; out sallied the Joyces and a score of other 'boys' from several tents at once, as if there had been some preconcerted signal; and the flourishing of shillelaghs did not long precede the using of them. Any one, to see an Irish fight for the first time, would conclude that a score or two must inevitably be put *hors de combat.* The very flourish of a regular shillelagh and the shout that accompanies it seem to be the immediate precursors of a fractured skull; but the affair, though bad enough, is not so fatal as it appears to be: the shillelaghs, no doubt, do sometimes descend upon a head, which is forthwith a broken head; but they oftener descend upon each other: and the fight soon becomes one of personal strength. The parties close and grapple; and the most powerful man throws his adversary: fair play is but little attended to: two or three often attack a single man; nor is there cessation of blows even when a man is on the ground."

Very little damage was done on this particular occasion, but elsewhere men were sometimes killed, frequently seriously wounded. It was Thomas Drummond, Under-Secretary for

Ireland from 1835 till 1840, who first conceived the idea—surely an obvious one—of directing the police to put a stop to these combats. His order was somewhat strenuously objected to, not apparently by the rioters themselves, but, curiously enough, by the police officers. They thought it much better to keep the police out of the way, and represented to the reforming Under-Secretary that any interference would be likely to end in bloodshed. A suggestive side-light on the methods of the Irish government in those days! But a respect for the sanctity of human life was perhaps not the only reason for the passive attitude of the police. I cull from Sir George Cornewall Lewis' *Irish Disturbances* the following strange passage:

"At one time the local authorities encouraged faction fighting; it seemed to them that the people must necessarily raise their hands against some one; and they thought that factions would serve the same purpose as the stone thrown by Cadmus among the earthborn warriors of Thebes—that of turning the violence of the combatants themselves upon one another."

*Divide et empera* is a wise political maxim,

but surely never was it so cynically acted upon as by those local authorities.

Sometimes the combatants had excellent reasons for their battles. There is a story told by Carleton in a hitherto unpublished novel, of a village whose inhabitants had a strong taste for historical drama. They agreed to act a play, and chose one called *The Battle of Aughrim.* In it the final and decisive battle between the Williamite and Jacobite forces in Ireland was represented in the style of a high old-fashioned tragedy. The village actors divided the parts among them on the most natural principles. The Protestants represented Ginckel and the Williamite officers. The Roman Catholics took St. Ruth, Sarsfield, and the men of the beaten side. Each actor was then in a position to enter with spirit into his part. The inevitable result ensued. There was a riot. Every strong passion, religious, racial, and political, was aroused, and the battle of Aughrim was in actual reality fought over again. The result when cool reflection came next day was unsatisfactory to both parties. But no one was inclined to give up the play. It was agreed that another performance

should take place, and that the Jacobite leaders should be taken by the Protestants while the Roman Catholics should shout the hated war-cries of their hereditary foes. In this way, the enthusiasm of both sides being damped by the unfamiliar positions in which they found themselves, it was hoped that a peaceful battle of Aughrim might be fought only on the stage. How the plan would have worked out we shall never know. On the evening of the performance the floor of the barn which served as a theatre gave way, and both armies were precipitated into the cow byre underneath.

Over the battle of Aughrim passions were sure to surge strongly, but it seems that religious tolerance was sometimes practised in Ireland in those days. The rector of a western parish was threatened with a visit from his bishop on a certain Sunday. He was plunged into despair at the prospect. What account he may have given beforehand of the condition of his parish we do not know, but in fact he had no more than about a dozen people attending his church. The rest of the inhabitants of the district were Roman Catholics, and the poor rector was greatly afraid

A QUIET WHIFF

that the bishop would be seriously angry. He told the trouble to the parish priest, with whom he appears to have been on excellent terms. The priest comforted him. "You leave the matter in my hands," he said, "and I'll see you all right." The appointed Sunday arrived. The priest's congregation assembled as usual, and considerably to their surprise were marched by their pastor to the Protestant Church. "Let every one of you behave yourselves," he said to them, "and, if you are in doubt what to do, keep your eye on me." The priest must have studied the rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer carefully. He sat in the front seat, and the behaviour of the congregation, a very large one, was exemplary. The bishop afterwards congratulated the fortunate rector on the excellent condition of his parish.

We are assured that religious bitterness is dying out in Ireland and will soon be a thing of the past ; but even the most optimistic, even a convinced English Liberal, will admit that we have some distance to go before we reach the breadth of charitable courtesy shown by that parish priest.

In the Life of Archbishop Trench—not the famous Dublin prelate, but one of the Protestant Archbishops of Tuam—there is an account given of the first meeting held in the west of Ireland town in support of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. The Roman Catholic priest attended the meeting, and in the course of a friendly speech gave his reasons for not becoming a member of the great Anglican missionary society. We have all—one may say it either with gladness or regret—become too firmly convinced of the truth of what we believe to do that sort of thing now.

The people then had amusements other than faction fights and inflammable plays. Hurling matches were common. Athletic contests aroused popular interest and excitement. The gentry took part with their tenants in these games, just as the tenants had their share in the sport of foxhunting. Kickham, in his *Knocknagow*, gives an account of a great contest in throwing the sled—a blacksmith's hammer—which took place between a Captain French and the village champion. The Captain, after an exciting struggle, was finally defeated, and took

his beating, it is pleasant to note, in very good part. The dancing of jigs and reels was in those days a regular part of the education of every Irish boy and girl. During the winter months a dancing master made his rounds through a wide district. Various families in each locality subscribed to pay his fees. The boys and girls assembled every night in one house or another, each bringing a candle, so that the hostess for the evening should be put to no expense in the provision of illumination. The dancing master was also the musician, and to the sound of his fiddle the complicated steps of the dances were diligently practised. When summer came there were dances at the cross roads, and it was seen how each had profited by the lessons of the winter. But those old days are gone. The famine cut short that Irish life. A great sorrow quenched the merry-making. A new purposeful life, gathering strength for half a century, has replaced the old careless recklessness with an earnest seriousness. Much that was bad has gone; but, since it is by no means possible to bring back the past, even the severest moralist may be permitted a sigh of regret. Those re-

probate ancestors of ours drank hard, fought frequently, and outraged every canon of economic science. But after all they lived vigorously, and that is something to their credit. Their possession of life force seems a superlative merit in these days when so many of us find it necessary to support the vital spark by consuming predigested foods. The faction fights are over, but have we gained greatly? The word survives among us and has given birth to a daughter, "factionist," a term as common now as the fights were then, and applied not to the muscular wielder of the blackthorn stick but to the misguided individual who in political matters ventures to think for himself. Our native dancing is being revived, but there is a certain artificiality about it now. Shall we get back the *joie de vivre* of the young men and maidens who tramped the roads on muddy nights, each with his candle in his hand? We are better men and women now, no doubt, but, no doubt also, we have lost something which all our earnestness will not give back to us.

# CHAPTER THREE

## AS WE SEE OURSELVES—THE NEW IRISHMAN

## CHAPTER THREE AS WE SEE OURSELVES: THE NEW IRISHMAN

WHAT OF THE IRISHMAN OF TO-DAY? Our neighbours across the Channel insist that he is an eloquent sentimentalist, preserving, in spite of his sentimentality, a capacity for rollicking on occasion. Our own writers, while steadily denying the sentimentality, admit the rollicking for the first half of the last century. But to-day nobody rollicks less than the Irishman, and according to our own writers, no one is freer from those illusions which lie at the back of sentimentality. We may take Mr. George Bernard Shaw to witness. Larry Doyle, in *John Bull's Other Island*, explains himself; but since we are all a little slow at understanding Mr. Shaw, we have Larry explained for us in the best of all Mr. Shaw's prefaces, an essay addressed to politicians, but which surely deserves to be classed with other such writings as an aid to critics. Doyle's contribution to the partnership in the play is, according to Mr. Shaw, "freedom from illusion, the power of facing facts, the nervous industry, the sharpened wits, the sensitive pride of an imaginative man

who has fought his way up through social persecution and poverty." This view of the Irish character is revolutionary. The cherished myth of the minor English novelists disappears at once. And Mr. Shaw is indubitably right. Nothing is more characteristic of the Irishman to-day than his freedom from illusion and his power of facing facts.

Some years ago a well-disposed English Chief Secretary paid a visit to an out-of-the-way part of the west coast of Ireland. A rumour went out among the inhabitants of the district that he had come among them with a cheque-book in his pocket and a readiness to spend large sums of money on works of public utility. The rumour was not wholly foolish. Amiable Chief Secretaries have often done this kind of thing. A leading man in the neighbourhood proposed to make this Chief Secretary's way easy to him by pointing out exactly what ought to be done. He went round his friends and asked them to join him in meeting the distinguished visitor with a view to persuading him to build a pier. One gentleman who was asked to join the deputation demurred.

"Where," he asked, "do you propose to put the pier?"

The leading man, the head of the deputation, named a spot.

"But," said the objector, "a pier will be no kind of use there. No boats ever go near that place. They couldn't if they wanted to."

"Nobody," said the other, "supposes for a moment that the pier will be any use, there or anywhere else. But if it's put where I want it, it will be well out of the way and do no harm to any one. That's as much as can be expected of any Government pier. What we want isn't really a pier, but a few hundred pounds spent in the locality."

That man showed a remarkable freedom from illusion, and a power of facing facts. An Englishman, under similar circumstances, would have been equally anxious to secure the Government money for his locality, but he would not have faced the facts with the Irishman's frankness. He would first have persuaded himself by means of articles in the local papers and speeches made at public meetings that a pier in that particular spot would be most useful in the

development of sea fisheries. Then he would have allowed himself to believe that it would ultimately attract cargo steamers to its hospitable stone sides, and so make for the increase of England's ever-swelling foreign trade. Finally one of his artists would have painted a picture of the future pier with the sea breaking on its face, and labelled his work, "An Outpost of Empire." Not till all that had been done would the Englishman ask the Chief Secretary to spend public money on the pier. The facts about the edifice would be the same whether an Englishman or an Irishman asked for it. It would not in either case be anything but an ornament to a desolate coast. The Irish recognise the facts, and stare them straight in the face without blinking. The English would have seen them only through a rosy mist of illusion, touched with Imperial sentimentalism. Thus Mr. Shaw's analysis of the character of the modern Irishman is justified by experience.

There was also a Chief Secretary—another one—equally benevolent with an equal power of drawing on the public purse. He received

a deputation of gentlemen who wanted a railway run through the district they represented. They came armed with persuasive statistics, which went to show that their neighbourhood was a hive of nascent industrial life, wanting nothing but the Government's aid in laying down a few rails to turn it forthwith into a kind of Lancashire. Nothing could have been more conclusive than the statistics. But this Chief Secretary—it is a sad thing to have to say this of any Chief Secretary, but it is true about this particular man—was of a sceptical temperament. He did not accept the statistics at their face value. He recollected that a similar deputation had waited on him some months previously from the same neighbourhood. The matter under consideration at that time was the distribution of some funds granted for the relief of famine in the west of Ireland. That deputation had also brought statistics of an equally persuasive kind which proved beyond shadow of doubt that the people were totally without resources and would starve unless the Government fed them. The choice for the Government then, in fact, lay between providing money for food and giv-

ing money for coffins. With a fine appreciation of the value of picturesque description this deputation said that the farmers of the district owned nothing "but a few little sheep, so small that the eagles had not been able to find them among the heather." The suggestion was that the eagles had carried off and eaten the larger sheep, cows, horses, and other animals which they were able to find. The sceptical Chief Secretary turned up this former batch of statistics and read them out to the deputation.

"How," he asked, with a bland smile, "do you explain the discrepancies between these two sets of figures?"

Englishmen, under the circumstances, would have explained the discrepancies, and what is more to the point, would have believed their own explanations. They would have said, perhaps, and believed, that the timely aid granted by the Government on the occasion of the famine, had actually effected an economic revolution in the place, changed it from a hungry wilderness into a potential Manchester. They would have seen both sets of statistics through

a mist of illusion, and remained, morally, perfectly honest men. The Irishman who led the deputation was intellectually honest, which is quite a different thing. He faced the facts and scorned illusion.

"Those statistics," he said, pointing to the bundle which had been dragged from its pigeonhole, "were compiled for an entirely different purpose."

But it would be a mistake to suppose that our appreciation of naked fact and our contempt for the draperies in which decency would swathe its limbs render us incapable of appreciating fine language. No people in the world likes oratory more than we do. No people is more ready to cheer to the echo any noble sentiment which is expressed for us in really majestic words. We are not in the least taken in by the orators. We know that at the back of the noble sentiments there are certain hard practical considerations, and it is with these that we are concerned. The oratory itself we describe privately by an expressive Irish word *ráméis*; which can perhaps scarcely be translated into English, but has an American equivalent in the phrase "talking

did any of the less obviously cynical candidates. They, almost certainly, believed his professions quite as much as they believed those of any one else. They cast their votes in the end for reasons wholly unconnected with the extension of patronage to home industries, or the influx of visitors to the "truly loyal and scenic constituency."

I dwell upon this fact-seeing illusion-proof characteristic of the modern Irishman, emphasised by Mr. Shaw, because most of our cleverer writers, though they have not expressed themselves so epigrammatically as he has, have been conscious of just these qualities in their countrymen. The delight which we are supposed to take—which in fact we actually do take—in playing up to the Englishmen who visit us, is in reality a kind of very natural inversion of our contempt for illusion. We know quite well that the Englishman is our superior in many matters. He succeeds where we fail, grows rich while we remain poor, and although he is, as a rule, much stupider than we are, he continues to govern us in spite of our efforts to prevent him ; although we ought by rights to be governing him. But

HOME FROM THE FAIR—A FINANCIAL MUDDLE

the Englishman cherishes his illusions, and especially his illusions about Ireland. When he lands on our shores he puts a temptation in our way which we should be more than human if we resisted. Our novelists delight in stories of our sympathetic treatment of Englishmen's ideas about Ireland. In Lever's time we were looked upon as a nation of barbarians who valued human life as little as the sportsman does the life of his grouse. Englishmen in those days went to and fro among us nervously. A certain timid traveller confessed to one of Lever's Irish country gentlemen that he had never seen a wake—the festivities connected with an Irish funeral. The Irishman, with the air of one anxious to gratify an honoured guest, ordered his butler to go out and shoot one of his tenants, naming a man who had always been behindhand with his rent.

That story was told a long time ago. It could scarcely be told with any kind of verisimilitude now, for Englishmen no longer believe that we shoot each other with quite the old light-heartedness. But illusions die hard. They still think that we are curiously callous about human life.

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So, when Mr. Flurry Knox McCarthy, in *Some Experiences of an Irish R.M.*, undertakes the education of Mr. Leigh Kelway, the earnest and thoroughly philanthropic secretary of Lord Waterbury, he allows him to listen to Slipper's account of the tragic death of young Driscoll at the Lisheen races.

"'The blood was druv out through his nose and ears,' continued Slipper, 'and you'd hear his bones cracking on the ground. You'd have pitied the poor boy, so you would.'

"'Good Heavens!' said Leigh Kelway, sitting up very straight in his chair.

"'Was he hurt, Slipper?' asked Flurry casually.

"'Hurt is it!' echoed Slipper, in high scorn. 'Killed on the spot.' He paused to relish the effect of this dénouement on Leigh Kelway. 'Oh, divil so pleasant an afternoon ever you seen; and indeed, Mr. Flurry, it's what we're all saying, it was a great pity your honour wasn't there on account of the liking you had for Driscoll.'

"Flurry listened, leaned back in his chair and began to laugh.

"'It scarcely strikes one as a comic incident,' said Leigh Kelway very coldly. 'In fact it seems to me that the police ought——'"

At that moment Driscoll himself appeared, vowing vengeance against Slipper. So our novelists, the earlier and the later, dwell on our fondness for making the most of the illusions of our English visitors. In real life such splendid opportunities seldom occur. But we do our best. Some time ago a very earnest Englishman, who described himself politically as a pronounced Home Ruler, made a tour of Ireland. He was passed from one cicerone to another and fell ultimately into the hands of an elderly parish priest. Having little of startling interest to display in his parish, this priest took the Englishman into the national school. Somebody coming in, threatened to cut short the inspection of copybooks.

"What a tyrant that man is!" said the priest. Then, as if struck by a brilliant idea, he turned to the scholars. "Children," he said, "can any of you tell me what is a tyrant?"

"Please, Father," said a little girl, "a tyrant is an English ruler."

The incident was splendidly stage-managed. The Englishman was filled with delight. He was a convinced Home Ruler, and this was exactly the kind of thing which he hoped to hear in Ireland. It came to him in the most convincing way at last, out of the mouths of babes and sucklings. He boasted to chance acquaintances afterwards that, in that school he had touched "the real soul of Ireland."

I am indebted to Mr. R. J. Mecredy of *The Irish Cyclist* for the following excellent illustration of our polite desire to make everything as pleasant as possible for our English visitors.

"A friend was camping for some weeks in the north-west corner of Donegal with the express purpose of studying the peasantry whom he loved. He could talk to them in Irish; he appreciated their folklore; he could contribute his share, and he understood and sympathised with their troubles, their hardships, and their aspirations. He was one of them, not a stranger, and so they opened their hearts to him. An English lady on her first visit to Ireland was lodging in the district. She was simply enrap-

tured with Ireland and the Irish, and told my friend what a lot she had learnt, especially about the fairies. She had met a delightful man who knew all about them, and had also seen them. He had given her some leaves from a fairy plant some thousand years old. My friend listened sympathetically, as an Irishman should, but with an inward smile.

"Later they met at a dance in a farmhouse kitchen. About midnight my friend started to return to his camp, but as it was now raining, a local farmer offered to pilot him by a short cut over the bog. They had only gone a few yards when his guide stopped, and with a quizzical twinkle in his eye remarked significantly: 'Thim English are divils on fairies, sir.' 'What do you mean?' asked my friend. 'The lady inside, sir,' with a jerk of his thumb. 'Oh, I see,' replied my friend, 'you're the man who has been telling her all about the fairies.' 'And why not? Sure she wanted to know, and I told her all I could, tho' sorra fairy or ghost ever I seen in my life.'"

There is, however, a mystical and imaginative side to the character of the contemporary

Irishman. He tends, especially while he is young, to write lyric poetry, and his verses are of very great merit. The poet's corner of obscure papers is a byword in England as the refuge of sentimental doggerel. In Ireland the reader comes across real poetry, strong, original, and melodious, in the most unexpected places. But even when he is writing poetry, the modern Irishman's affection for stark facts and his hatred of illusion beset him. The value—one hopes the permanent value—of the work of our younger Irish poets lies in their avoidance of the unreal and their determined efforts to get back to the primitive simple emotions.

But fond as our writers are of lyric poetry, they are still fonder of the drama. It is by means of the stage that we are continually trying to express the ideas that are in us. So common has the habit of playwriting become, that an Irish author boasted recently that his chief distinction lay in the fact that he was the only man in Ireland who had never written a play. He probably exaggerated his singularity. There must be others, small farmers, for instance, in

the Congested Districts, who have not written plays, but there must be very few. Our dramatists, like our lyric poets, seem to be obsessed with a passion for facts. They will not look at life through rose-coloured glasses. Their tragedies are tragedies of naked realism. Their comedies—and they produce comedies which sparkle—are relentless exposures of our pettiness, our meanness, and our narrow outlook upon life. No literature known to me is less touched with sentimentalism than our Irish drama. Whatever else may be laid to the charge of our playwriters, it can never be said that they have been guilty of pandering to the popular taste by flattering the Irish people. More than once storms of indignation have been aroused by representations of Irish life which have been regarded as deliberate insults. Nowhere is the change from the old Ireland to the new more clearly seen than in the contrast between our orators and our dramatists. Speech-making was the one great art of nineteenth-century Ireland. And our orators still cling to the old tradition, adorning their productions with intoxicating panegyrics of all things Irish. The drama is the

Irish art of the twentieth century, and our dramatists are so determined to rub salt into our wounds that they scarcely give us credit for having any whole part in us.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## THE IRISH CLERGY

# CHAP. FOUR THE IRISH CLERGY

IN IRELAND THE CLERGY PLAY A MUCH more important part in the national life than they do in England or Scotland, and opinions differ a good deal about them. The feelings felt by the minstrel for Father O'Flynn are common enough still, and there is many an Irish priest who deserves the high praise given in the song to the

> "Powerfullest preacher, and
> Tinderest teacher, and
> Kindliest creature in ould Donegal."

Such men deserve the place they have in the affection of the people, and are likely to continue, for some time at all events, to be the leaders in the various attempts to better the lives of their parishioners. But there is also a strong current of anti-clerical feeling which in Ireland itself finds expression in half-subdued growls, and breaks out into unnecessarily vigorous anathemas among those who escape, temporarily, to England. There was an Irish clergyman who met a fellow-countrywoman of his in London. She talked frankly, as we all do, about Irish affairs, and at last expressed the conclusion of

the whole matter thus: "We shall never do any real good in Ireland till every clergyman of every denomination is either hanged or shot." Then, having witnessed to the faith that was in her, she realised suddenly that her listener belonged to the condemned profession. She at once apologised, smiling, to his wife. He happened to be the kind of clergyman who has a wife. If he had been a celibate she would probably not have apologised at all.

In England, so one gathers from the newspapers, a great many people are anxious to find out why other people do not go to church. The problem there is pressing and important. In Ireland it is as yet purely academic, because, for the most part, we do go to church pretty frequently. Perhaps we are really more religious than the English. Perhaps we are too poor to afford the Sunday amusements which have had such a demoralising effect upon our neighbours. Perhaps we are simply a little behind the times and will follow the example set us when the fashion of a non-religious Sunday comes to us across the Channel. Perhaps—it would be very pleasant to think that this was true—our clergy

give us something in the way of sermons worth going to church to listen to. Irish preachers have always had a reputation for eloquence, and the list of pulpit orators to whom the English have delighted to listen contains the names of a considerable number of Irishmen. But the race of eloquent preachers is dying out. One no longer hears stories of congregations moved to floods of tears, or fine ladies casting their jewelled bracelets into alms bags, driven by passionate appeals beyond the limits set to their charity by the coin they brought to church with them. Such things used to happen. I do not hear of their happening now. Nor do enraptured damsels crowd round the pulpit steps in such numbers as to make the descent of the preacher almost impossible. They used to do so thirty years ago, and it is recorded of a very popular Irish preacher that he was once actually besieged in his pulpit and obliged to add a clause to his sermon to the effect that he could not attempt to come down until every one of his admirers had not only withdrawn from the neighbourhood of the pulpit, but left the church. Those days, fortunately, are over; but our clergy

still receive the admiration due to their efforts, and their sermons are highly attractive to the intelligent laity.

The subject of sermons came up in the course of a conversation between a few friends who, as it happened, belonged to different Churches. They agreed to relate their most striking experiences of pulpit oratory. One of them told of a preacher, whose deliberately precise intonation he imitated carefully, who began his sermon thus: "This text, my beloved brethren, may be said to occupy an intermediate position between that which precedes and that which immediately follows it." The statement was, at all events, obviously true. It cannot be urged against that man that he forced his hearers into the *credo quia impossibile* frame of mind. They believed because the thing stated could not possibly be otherwise. The second story told was of a preacher of much greater virility and imaginative power. His subject was the unpleasant place to which bad people go after they die. He succeeded in representing it as a particularly horrible kind of menagerie. "When you're there," he said, "the lions will roar at

yez, the serpents will hiss at yez, the owls will hoot at yez, and the hyenas will laugh yez to scorn." The next member of the company hesitated. He had nothing to offer at all equal to the laughing hyenas. It was only after being pressed that he told of a preacher who found himself called upon to deal with one of the deeper mysteries of the Christian faith. He was quite frank with his congregation. "This, brethren," he said, "is a matter which I have never been able to understand, or even to explain." It would be interesting to know what opinion his people had of his understanding of the next subject which he did venture to explain. The fourth story of the quartette was of one of those preachers who believe in the use of the simple forcible language of every day and distrust the moving power of words consecrated to pulpit use. His subject was that final episode in Jezebel's life when she painted her face, tired her head, looked out of the window and taunted the victorious Jehu. "And would you believe it," said the preacher, after emphasising the account of the queen's toilet, "when she did that the hussy was upwards of sixty years of age!"

Another preacher, animated by a similar hankering after the unconventional, gave the following version of the final tragedy of the Baptist's life: "So the executioner swung his sword and swish went poor John's head."

I knew another man with a reputation for speaking blunt truths in plain, in the very homeliest, language. He never indulged in high-flown rhetoric. Poetry, all that passes for poetry in the pulpit, was abhorrent to him. Yet once, in the very middle of one of the most absolutely straightforward and unadorned sermons I ever heard, this preacher broke into the most appallingly high-falutin simile. He said that man, the plain, common man in the pew, was like a soldier charging through the ranks of the enemy amid the blinding smoke and desperate din of battle. He traced the course of the hero amid bullets, bayonet stabs, and sabre cuts, until he left him, still clinging to the tattered flag of his country, breathless before the feet of his beloved monarch. Only then did he become conscious of the bleeding wounds, the desperate gashes, the broken limbs of which during the excitement of the battle-charge he

A RARE EDITION

was wholly unaware. "So," said the preacher, "is it with you and me——" But I need not pursue the other branch of the simile. Its working out is obvious. In the privacy of the vestry afterwards another cleric reproached the preacher. "Why," he said, "did you spoil an excellent sermon with that ridiculous piece of bombast?" The reply was startling. "The fact is, that bit about the soldier on the battlefield was put in by my wife. What I wrote originally was: 'When a man is bathing and cuts his foot he doesn't notice it till he gets out of the water and begins to dry himself.'"

Occasionally it is the congregation and not the preacher which says the funny thing. A curate, young, nervous, but well-intentioned, was sent to address an assembly of peasants and dogs in the kitchen of a remote farmhouse. The room was about 10 feet long and 8 broad. Nevertheless, an ancient labourer, who was at the least deaf, complained afterwards that he couldn't hear a word that was said. On the next occasion the curate took this man and set him on a chair in such a position that the entire address was spoken straight into his ear, there being a

distance of about a foot and a half between it and the speaker's mouth.

"Well, Thomas," said the curate afterwards, "did you hear what I said to-night?"

"I did, your reverence, but sure, what good was it to me? What I do be wanting is to have the Gospel druv home hard into my soul."

But it must not be supposed that the laugh is always on the side of the congregation. The clergy occasionally score, sometimes unconsciously, sometimes with malicious intent. There was a respected rector of a western parish who not long ago made his listeners supremely uncomfortable by begging them to remember that in a few years they would most surely "all be smouldering in their graves." He probably meant "mouldering." The word he accidentally used suggested a very unpleasant future for a respectable and upright community. A very eminent ecclesiastic was once forced, very much against his will, to preach a sermon in aid of the fund for restoring an out-of-the-way church. He revenged himself on the unfortunate congregation, who had put pressure on him, when he had them helpless before him. "Your offer-

ings to-day," he said, "are to be devoted to the fund for repairing and," looking slowly round him with an audible sniff, "if such a thing be possible, the beautifying of this church." The people had been rather proud of their parish church beforehand; the conceit went out of them after that. This same dignitary was much sought after as a preacher and held in some awe on account of his mordant wit. On one occasion he unbent unexpectedly, rather to the embarrassment of his host. He was preaching a charity sermon in a church a long way from his home, and it was arranged that he should be entertained by the principal gentleman in the parish. This gentleman, though an excellent man, was unaccustomed to ecclesiastics, being himself an officer in the army. He made, a little nervously, elaborate and conscientious preparations for his guest. He turned his smoking-room into a study for the time being, and collected all the books bearing on the subject of religion which he could find in the house. There were not many, and what there were were not up to date. Round the smoking-room table, when the eminent preacher arrived, were arranged Paley's *Evidences*,

Hervey's *Meditations among the Tombs*, a work called *The Olive Leaf of Bethany*, and two volumes of sermons by forgotten Puritan divines. They were dusty when their owner unearthed them from a lumber room, but he polished them up and felt that they made a brave show when he laid them out. The great preacher, led to the "study" that he might rest a while after his journey, took these books up one by one and looked at them. He laid each volume down with a sniff. His host became more and more uncomfortable. "Are there," said the clergyman at last, "no other books of any kind in the house?" His host, conscious of many novels, stored carefully out of sight, admitted that there were other books. "Then," said the clergyman, "bring me another, and let it be frothy, if possible, the frothiest of the frothy." I do not know what book was actually brought, perhaps *The Visits of Elizabeth*, which was just then at the height of its popularity: but most intimate and friendly relations were established at once between host and guest. Constraint vanished, and the rest of the visit was actually merry.

There is a proverb which says that hawks do not pluck out hawks' eyes ; but it is not regarded by the Irish clergy. Their wit is as keenly barbed for their professional brethren as it is for the laity. Perhaps the severest thing ever said by one clergyman about another was said about a bishop who had just died. A number of his clergy happened to meet, and very naturally fell to discussing the merits and faults of the prelate they had lost. One of them, a man who had his own reasons for disliking the bishop, told a story of a dream he had. "I was walking along the road," he said, "near the place where they buried the bishop. Whom should I see coming along to meet me but the old man himself. He had his robes on him and his pastoral staff in his hand, and he looked very much as he did when he was alive. No sooner did he come up to me than he stretched out his staff and touched me on the hand with it. Would you believe me, gentlemen, I was burnt to the bone, for *the staff was red hot.*" The region to which the bishop had departed may be inferred.

The General Synod of the Church of Ireland

meets once a year in Dublin. Being a deliberative assembly in which every member is entitled to make a speech if he likes, its sittings might be of almost any length, though as a matter of fact they seldom last more than four days. An anxious clergyman, who had left his parishioners shepherdless while he attended the Synod, asked an eminent prelate how long he thought the sitting would last. "I do not know," was the reply, "but I am told that geese generally sit for four weeks." Even more cruel was a proposal made by one of the members of the Synod. The building in which the assembly meets is a very handsome one, containing a central hall, a number of committee rooms, a luncheon room and other offices. It was suggested that appropriate texts of Scripture should be placed over the doors of the various rooms. That this was never done was probably due to the prompt suggestion by a member of the Synod of a verse appropriate for the luncheon room. He took it from the book of the Psalms: "Here the wild asses quench their thirst." The same clergyman was once sitting in the Synod Hall, immediately under-

neath the strangers' gallery. A lady, who had come with the intention of sitting out a long debate, and had taken precautions against exhaustion, dropped her bottle of smelling salts from the front of the gallery. It narrowly missed hitting the clergyman underneath, falling just at his feet. He looked up with a smile, and once more quoted a psalm with singular aptness: "Let not your precious balms break my head." But his best joke was made under circumstances which for most of us make jesting a total impossibility. He had crossed from Holyhead to Kingstown on a very stormy night, and suffered for hours in the usual unpleasant way. An ecclesiastically-minded Englishman who happened to be in the steamer, took it into his head, for some reason, that the obviously seasick clergyman was a bishop. As the steamer approached the pier at Kingstown, he asked politely, "Is this your see, my Lord?" "No," replied the clergyman, glancing at the waves which had caused him so much misery; "if it were, I should keep it in better order."

Another clergyman, this time an adherent of the Roman Communion, is credited with a

more delicately pointed joke on the same painful subject. He was in charge at the time of a sea-board parish, and it happened that an English Chief Secretary landed there one day from a small steamer in which he had been making a tour of the coast. He and his attendant officials had encountered bad weather, and when they came ashore looked as if they were recovering from severe illness. The Chief Secretary complained to the priest: "They tell me," he said, "that your Church has unlimited power in the west of Ireland. I wish you'd arrange to have the sea calm for us to-morrow." The priest shook his head. He could not command the waves. The Chief Secretary persisted, "But if the Church has all the power she professes—" "The Church's power," said the priest, "extends as far as high-water mark. Beyond that it's 'Rule, Britannia! Britannia rules the waves.'" The Chief Secretary represented the might of the world's greatest maritime power, but the colour of his cheeks gave the lie to any boast he might have been inclined to make about ruling the waves.

A provincial town was treated a little while

ago to a curiously conclusive example of the power of the Church, this time of the Protestant Church. The rector, who was a very musical man and most energetic in his efforts to provide high-class entertainments for the town, got together a choir capable of singing Spohr's "Last Judgment." The performance was largely advertised. The posters ran thus :

THE LAST JUDGMENT

By Spohr

Will be performed in, etc. etc.

At the last moment an important soloist got a sore throat, and no substitute could be found to take the part. The unfortunate rector was obliged very hurriedly to get slips printed with the word "Postponed." The bill-stickers went round the town and pasted these over the middle of the original posters. A Roman Catholic townsman twitted a Protestant friend with the extraordinary appearance the posters then bore. "Have you seen," he said, "what your rector has stuck up all over the town, 'The Last Judgment Postponed'?" "Well," said the Protestant in reply, "that's more than your

clergy could do anyhow." We are accused, not without some show of justice, of taking our religious differences very seriously in Ireland, but an incident of this kind resolves the *odium theologicum* in the surest of ways.

The habit of smoking was frowned upon by the severer Irish clergy long after it became popular among their brethren in England. The example of Archbishop Whately, who is said to have been fond of tobacco, ought to have done something towards establishing a more liberal view. But it came too early. Even laymen were dubious about the propriety of smoking in his days. The prejudice has now almost died away, but until quite lately a smoker felt it wise to conceal his weakness when staying in old-fashioned country rectories. One young cleric found himself the guest for a week of an elderly dignitary of most venerable appearance and strictly professional manner. The young man earnestly desired a pipe before he went to bed at night, but was ashamed to say so. He hypocritically asserted that he always slept better if he went for a short walk in the air before turning in. During this walk he puffed as fast

and as hard as he could at his pipe. All went well until the last night of his stay was reached. The rain fell in torrents and a severe gale raged round the house. The hospitable old Canon besought his guest not to go out in such weather. The young man, fingering his pipe in his pocket, insisted. But he did not feel it necessary to go far. He stopped under the nearest tree, and, at the expense of about half a box of matches, lit his pipe. Cowering under his umbrella with his back to the wind, he had just begun to enjoy his smoke when he heard himself hailed by his host from the door-step of the house. "Do you mean to say," said the old man, "that you've gone out of doors every night to smoke, and that your walk was only an excuse?" The young man, caught hopelessly, confessed that this was so. "My goodness," said his host, "what a pity! I've gone down to the kitchen every night after you went to bed and blown my smoke up the chimney for fear of shocking you." That last night at least both these worthy men smoked comfortably in large armchairs before the fire in the Canon's study.

The wave of temperance reform which has swept over Ireland during the last few years has produced a good deal of hardship among the more easygoing clergy of all Churches. It is told of one man that he found a bold way of rendering periods of total abstinence endurable. Under the influence of a fervid missionary he and all his parishioners signed a pledge. They kept it faithfully until a day arrived when the clergyman felt that the limit of human endurance had been reached. Christmas was close at hand. He is credited with having absolved the parish, himself included, from the pledge for a period of one week, stating plainly that the promise would be binding again on New Year's Eve.

It is not only, perhaps not chiefly, the clergy who feel the burden of our new temperance morality. The humble layman is sometimes quite pathetic in his desire for a little indulgence. There was a young man of somewhat intemperate habits who, acting on the advice of his parents, made up his mind to marry and settle down. A young woman was found who was willing to take him for better or for worse.

His clergyman, seizing what seemed to be a great opportunity, urged the young man to take the temperance pledge. "I will, your reverence," said the young man. "I know well it would be better for me if I had it. I'll take it, and what's more I'll keep it." The clergyman, anxious to strike while the iron was hot, produced a pen and ink and the necessary form. The young man unaccountably held back. The clergyman pressed him. "To-morrow," he said, "is your wedding-day. Now is the time to sign the pledge." "Sure you mustn't be hard on me, your reverence; it'll be time enough if I sign it the day after to-morrow." Explanations followed. It appeared that a half-barrel of porter had been ordered for the wedding-feast. The clergyman was human. He realised the awful position of a bridegroom who could not drink porter at his own wedding. The pledge-signing took place on the first day of the honeymoon.

There are many stories about the dogmatic differences between the two Churches and the rivalry between their clergy. On one occasion it happened that, owing to there being a crowd in the only available hotel, two clergymen,

members of different Churches, were obliged to sleep in the same bedroom. Each, before getting into bed, knelt down to say his prayers. Each determined, for the honour of his Church, that his prayers should not be shorter than those of his rival. Each eyed the other from time to time and continued kneeling. In the morning they were found by the boots of the hotel who came to call them, each kneeling at his own bedside, and both sound asleep. This is not a story which is ever told by the clergy, but it is very popular among laymen.

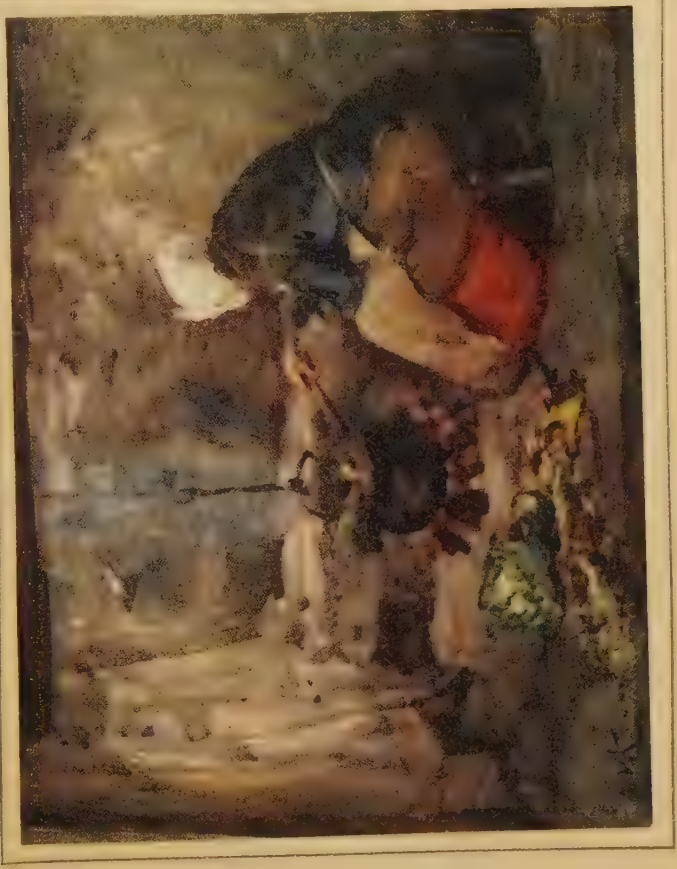
A very witty priest was once asked by a Protestant for his candid unofficial opinion on the subject of Purgatory. "It's my belief," he replied, "that you might go farther and fare worse." Another priest settled the controversy between the two Churches in a short and easy fashion. Taking a Bible he opened at the first and longest of St. Paul's epistles. "Tell me now," he said, "who did the Apostle write that to?" "The Romans," said his opponent. "That's enough," said the priest. "You show me the epistle he ever wrote to the Protestants, and I'll give in to you."

The old-fashioned parish clerk was not strictly speaking a clergyman, but he was in his own estimation, and I think in that of the law, an ecclesiastical person. In Ireland he had no small opinion of his own importance. There was one who presided over the rector and congregation of a parish in the north of Ireland. It was well understood that he, and he alone, uttered those parts of the service which are allotted by the Church to the congregation. It would have been regarded as no more outrageous to repeat the Absolution aloud with the priest, than to join the clerk in the responses, of which he had taken entire possession. But there once came to the house of one of the parishioners an English visitor, who did not understand the local "use." On Sunday morning he began to repeat the responses in an audible voice. The clerk stood it for some time, but finally rebuked the audacious stranger. In the middle of the Litany, he stood up and said solemnly, "Sir, either you or me must quit."

Another self-opinionated clerk made up his mind that the proper way to pronounce the name of the sea monster mentioned in the Psalms was

Levĭāthan, with a short i and a strong accent on the penultimate syllable. In his church the psalms were not sung, but read verse about by the clergyman and his clerk. The rector, who was something of a precisian in matters of detail, was greatly annoyed by this pronunciation. He reasoned with the clerk, but the clerk refused to be convinced. He went on saying Levĭāthan whenever the psalm for the day gave him the chance. At last the rector was driven to a desperate expedient. He took a note of the day of the month on which Leviathan appeared in the clerk's verse of the Psalms, and whenever Sunday fell on that day he altered the date, putting the calendar either forward or back a day. His exercise of authority was not equal to that of the clergyman who postponed the "Last Judgment," but it was certainly an unwarrantable interference with affairs which lie beyond the province of ecclesiastics.

I close this chapter with two stories, neither of which has any discoverable moral, though both help to illustrate the respect of the Irish people for their clergy, and the feeling they en-



tertain for the religion which the clergy teach. Some time ago a regrettable but quite temporary outbreak of anger against a generally respected clergyman ended in the throwing of stones at his windows by some ill-affected persons. The people of a neighbouring parish presented him with an address of condolence, calculated to bring home to his proper parishioners a sense of their degraded wickedness. It ended with the wish that he might long live to adorn "that high office in the Church to which it has been Almighty God's most pleasing duty to appoint you." This conception of the Deity as a suave returning officer is a valuable addition to the garnered anthropomorphisms of popular mythology.

The other story belongs to an eloquent mission preacher. He told it to a congregation which may have been sleepy at the beginning of his sermon but must certainly have wakened up when he came to this anecdote. There were two old women in one parish who were greatly given to quarrelling, and when they fell out with each other they used terribly bad language. It happened that one of them went to confession

one day. As she was leaving the church, having received absolution, she met her enemy, who was going in. On the very steps of the sacred edifice a quarrel began. The woman who was entering the church poured out the usual stream of sacrilegious and blasphemous abuse. The other listened to her in silence for some time, and then, no longer able to endure the triumph of her adversary, said bitterly, "It's easy seeing, Biddy Malone, that you know I'm in a state of grace this minute and can't answer you. But, glory be to God, I won't be so for long!"

# CHAPTER FIVE

## THE IRISH OFFICIAL

# CHAP. FIVE THE IRISH OFFICIAL

IRELAND IS A PARADISE FOR THE OFFICIAL. There may be other paradises for him in the world, but I doubt of the existence of any so completely satisfying as Ireland. In Germany he is said to have great power over the public, but then in Germany he himself is a man under authority. Above the mightiest German officials is the Emperor. In England he is very well paid, but hitherto in England he has been forced to comport himself occasionally as the servant, not the master, of the public. In Ireland the high official is under no authority, and he has reduced the public to a condition of absolute submissiveness. He draws a salary which is very large compared to the earnings of private individuals, and he occupies of right the highest possible position in society. Subordinate officials are of course not quite so well paid and they have to submit more or less to their superiors, but towards the general public their attitude is that of stern but on the whole benevolent despots. They know that they are always in the right, and having power to enforce their will they do it with a clear conscience. So

Ireland is the country to which worthy officials hope to go when they die.

Under these circumstances it is natural that we should all wish to be officials. Whatever the original position of an Irishman may be, there is always some official post for him to look forward to. If he is influential, powerful, or unusually skilful, he aspires to be the head of one of our great Government departments. If he is lowly and has no backing in high places, he may have to content himself with the secretaryship of an Old Age Pensions sub-committee. In any case, what he has got to do is to make himself agreeable to the people who have the giving of the particular job he wants. In England there is a certain cloak of decency thrown over the making of official appointments. Many positions are filled by means of competitive examinations. The theory of these is of course absurd. The fact that a man shows unusual skill in outwitting an examiner in the matter of French grammar is no guarantee whatever that he is particularly well qualified to collect income tax. But the English people have persuaded themselves that an examination is a test of ability.

That is one of the illusions to which they cling. We, who have no illusions, have never gone in for competitive examinations. Our appointments, like kissing, go by favour. We do indeed insist that the candidates for certain minor and comparatively ill-paid posts must be qualified. For instance, a girl who wants to earn £80 a year by teaching people to cook must first satisfy a superior official that she herself can cook. After she has done that her chances of obtaining employment and earning her £80 a year depend upon the amount of influence she can bring to bear on the members of some committee. A dispensary doctor, who may be paid anything from £100 to £160 a year, must be qualified, that is to say, he must have some kind of medical degree. If he has that, he is much more likely to be appointed to a district because his father was evicted in the days of the Land League, or because his uncle is an influential Orangeman, than on account of any special aptitude he may possess for snaring microbes. Religion too, though the fact is strenuously denied, has a good deal to do with the appointment of doctors. In our private lives we are very toler-

ant of the religious professions of our medical advisers. An unbending Protestant will often allow a Roman Catholic doctor to set his broken leg. A Roman Catholic has no real objection to paying a Protestant for advising him to take a pill. But when it comes to appointing the doctor who is to dose the very poor we are much more careful. Then we see to it that the man who gets our votes is a man of unblemished orthodoxy. An Irish member of Parliament once startled a sleepy House of Commons at about two o'clock in the morning by making the following statement: "I have known seven dispensary doctors, all of them men appointed upon religious grounds, and all of them died of delirium tremens." His experience was unfortunate. Nothing like 100 per cent. of our dispensary doctors suffer from that particular disease, but what he said goes to show the advantage of considering a man's religion before you give him £100 a year for doctoring the poor.

For the higher official positions no qualifications of any kind are required. We insist that a laundress shall pass an examination in washing collars before we turn her loose with £80

a year to teach other people to wash collars. We do not ask a Local Government Board Inspector to convince any one that he can inspect anything. We give him his £500 to £700 a year if we feel reasonably sure that he is not actually blind. The result of this system of making appointments is a little surprising. The public has the greatest respect for the high officials who have given no evidence of being qualified for their posts. It adopts an attitude of critical but kindly forbearance towards the inferior officials who have demonstrated to somebody that they understand their business. A very nice and thoroughly competent young lady was sent some time ago to a parish that she might instruct the inhabitants in the art of making butter. An energetic clergyman—there is always an energetic clergyman on these occasions—went round the district and extracted from the wives and daughters of the farmers promises that they would attend the classes. They did so, and their opinions of the instructress were summed up afterwards by one of their number: "She's a very nice young girl, so she is; and I wouldn't say but with a little

practice she might be able to make good enough butter; but sure them ones is too fond of talking."

An official with a higher salary, though without anything like the certificates held by that young lady, would have been looked up to and not patronised. An Englishman of a freebooting and buccaneering type was a little while ago shut up for a short time in an Irish jail. He had succeeded in swindling the keeper of a public-house out of a small sum of money; which shows that he was a man of great financial ability, for an Irish publican is a particularly difficult man to rob. He was visited, of course, by the prison chaplain, and proved to be so entertaining a companion that the clergyman spent a good deal of time with him. About his career in his own native land he said very little, but he spoke quite freely about his time in Ireland. He had wandered somehow into a rural district somewhere in the south. Being in funds at the time he put up comfortably at the local inn. His host made up his mind that he must be an important official in the employment of the Land Commission. The Englishman, who

probably had reasons of his own for pretending to be something other than he actually was, accepted the character assigned to him. He walked about all day looking at fields, and occasionally poked loose clay with the end of his stick. This is not what Land Commissioners actually do, but it was the Englishman's conception of their duties. The inhabitants of the district accepted him at the innkeeper's valuation. They all wanted to buy their farms and to buy them as cheaply as possible. The advent of an important official among them seemed to offer an opportunity. One after another the farmers called to see him, paid for his drinks and even offered him small sums of actual cash, hoping thereby to secure his goodwill. The local landlord, who was quite as anxious to sell his estate as the tenants were to buy it, invited the supposed Commissioner to dinner and treated him really well. Unfortunately—and this shows the disadvantage of not having a good general education—the man gave himself away through not understanding the intricate procedure of Irish land purchase. He said or did something which showed clearly that he was

not a real official. He had to leave the neighbourhood at once, and almost immediately afterwards got into the trouble which ended in prison. He was most anxious, during the leisure which the law secured him, to learn as much as possible, from the prison chaplain, about the way in which Irish estates are bought and sold. He proposed, so he said frankly, to go "back to the land" as soon as he was set at liberty. Of this man's subsequent career I am unfortunately quite ignorant. But the story, as I have told it, has its value as an instance of the great respect and kindness with which high officials are treated in Ireland.

The same chaplain had another experience, which, though it only very indirectly illustrates the subject of this chapter, may be included here to show that there is a human side to the sternest of Irish officials and that even prison warders have an appreciation of humorous situations. There was a prisoner called Finnegan whose offence against the law was nothing worse than begging. Why this particular man should have been singled out to be punished for an offence which hundreds of people commit

with impunity every day all over Ireland, it is impossible to say. The law, like everything else on this side of the Irish Sea, is erratic in its action. Not only are some people punished for what other people do without punishment, but the same man is often imprisoned and praised for the same action. The ministers of the law "deliver over to executors pale" some one for making a speech which the makers of the law are citing with high approbation in the House of Commons. Thus it happens that our respect for law in this country is like the reverence of the savage for his idol. We know it to be powerful, but we feel it to be capricious. We cannot calculate with any confidence on what its next action will be. We alternately propitiate and defy it, accepting its decisions, whatever they be, with a cheerful kind of fatalism. So the beggar submitted to his term of imprisonment with a good grace. Other beggars were no doubt prospering while he was held captive, but no feeling of injustice preyed on him. He was cheerful and obedient. He endeared himself during his short stay to the chaplain and the warders. When he got out early on a Tues-

day morning he called on the chaplain and asked for the modest sum of a shilling. He said he wanted it in order to be able to make a fresh start in life. The chaplain gave it to him, but because he happened at the moment to be shaving, did not add any good advice to the gift. That evening the chaplain called at the prison on business. He was greeted at the gate by a grinning warder. "Your reverence," said the man, "your friend Finnegan is in again. He turned up here paralytic drunk an hour ago." The chaplain did not at first see anything funny in this lapse. Afterwards the reason of the warder's amusement dawned upon him. "He was singing at the top of his voice," said the warder, "when they were conducting him in, and it was a hymn he had, 'Hold the fort, for I am coming.'" After all, the religious influences brought to bear on prisoners are not entirely wasted. The most curious point of this man's story is that when he returned to the prison in the evening he had one and tenpence in his pocket. He must have spent at least two shillings in becoming "paralytic drunk." The chaplain had only given him a shilling, so

he was evidently a beggar of considerable ability.

It must not, however, be supposed that Irish officials lead indolent and easy lives. The exact opposite is the case. No body of men in the world works harder. No one is more conscientious about giving full value for the salaries earned. Even the minor clerks in Government offices are filled with a zeal for toil and a hatred of idleness. These men are paid to write letters, and they write enormous numbers of them. Nothing pleases them better than the discovery of a subject to write about. A clerk in the Education Office, for instance, will pore over the returns sent in by school managers until he finds one case in which the area of the school floor has not been stated in square feet. He knows in his heart that the schoolroom has neither expanded nor shrunk during the period of twelve months covered by the return. He has, for perhaps twenty years or even longer, made annually a careful note of the fact that that particular schoolroom had an area of 400 square feet. But he is anxious above all things to earn his salary honestly. He writes a courteous letter to

the forgetful manager asking him for the information that he does not want. The manager, who is not paid by any one to write letters, does not answer. The clerk is still more pleased. Being an honourable man he feels that he is now giving the taxpayer value for his money. He writes another letter. The manager, with a slight feeling of irritation, drops it into the waste-paper basket. The clerk, with a happy smile, writes a third, then a fourth, a fifth, a sixth, perhaps, if nothing happens to divert his energies into another channel, a twentieth letter about the area of that schoolroom floor. The public, represented in this case by the school manager, is often harassed and vexed by this extreme activity of the officials. The attitude is quite unreasonable. If you pay a man for writing letters you ought to be pleased to discover that he writes as many as he possibly can.

Other officials wear themselves out prematurely by travelling. They go from end to end of the country in railway trains, and it has been estimated that it is impossible to walk the length of any station platform in Ireland without running into two or three men out at the expense

A ROADSIDE, CONNEMARA

of the Government for the purpose of inspecting something. This ceaseless wayfaring is very hard indeed on the inspectors. Travelling by Irish railways is a trying business at the best. The station-masters, guards, ticket-collectors, and porters are themselves officials, though not yet in the pay of the Government. They therefore treat the public as if the public existed for the purpose of providing them with occupation. They are as a rule kind-hearted and they do not go out of their way to annoy travellers unnecessarily. They simply take an official view of life. In England, where the shareholders of the railway companies want to earn money, and on the Continental state railways, where the officials can be made amenable to public authority by means of agitation, a train is supposed to be a convenience to travellers. In Ireland a train is a train, a self-existing, self-sufficing entity, the travellers being an unimportant by-product of the system. In England, if there be good reason to suppose that there will be an unusually large number of passengers on any particular day, Whit-Monday for instance, additional coaches are added to the train, so that there is

room for passengers. In Ireland, even when the experience of years has proved that on certain days there is sure to be double the usual number of passengers, the train remains exactly its normal length. The view taken by the officials of the railway company is that if a large number of people in response to the offer of a cheap excursion, or for the purpose of attending Punchestown Races, insists on travelling by the same train, some of them must suffer the inconvenience of being left behind at junctions. The Irish public is well accustomed to this treatment and does not resent it. It is merely another instance of the way in which all officials assert their rights. But some time ago an Englishman, unused to Irish railways, found himself travelling in an overcrowded train. In due time he arrived at a junction, at which he was told to change into another train. It was exactly the same length as the train he had left and had already its full complement of passengers. The consequence of trying to get another trainful of passengers into it was, of course, extreme congestion. The Englishman found that he had no hope of getting a seat. He held

a first-class ticket, but that did not help him, for all classes, first, second, and third, were equally full. He approached the guard and then the station-master and demanded that an extra coach should be attached to the train. This seemed to him a reasonable demand. To the officials it seemed an unheard-of kind of insolence. They snubbed the passenger sharply. Being an Englishman, he asserted himself, quoted legal decisions and generally threatened to make a disagreeable fuss if he were left behind. In the course of his speech the officials discovered that he was an Englishman, and therefore not to be treated as their own subjects are. They immediately turned several Irish people out of the carriage in which they had settled themselves and made room for the turbulent Saxon. It was only a third-class carriage, for in Ireland it is not safe to interfere seriously with first-class passengers. They may turn out to be officials of a superior kind.

But Irish railway officials, if approached with proper humility, are always ready to be helpful, and frequently go out of their way to impart really useful information. A traveller once

found himself stranded at an out-of-the-way junction at ten o'clock at night. It was necessary to spend the night in the place, and he had never been there before. He asked a porter if there were an hotel in which he could get a room. "There's two hotels," said the porter, "and it's likely that there's plenty of rooms in either of them." The traveller asked which of the two was the better. "There's some," said the porter, "that prefer the Railway Hotel, and there's some that prefer the Imperial, but whichever of the two you go to you'll find yourself lying awake the most of the night wishing you'd gone to the other." Only an official in a secure and independent position could afford to give that kind of totally unbiased information to a chance stranger.

Another instance of official courtesy came recently under the notice of a friend of mine. It was his melancholy duty to attend the coffin of a distant relative which was being conveyed to the family burying-place by rail. A mortuary van was attached to the train, but happened, when the train drew up, to be at the end of the platform a long way from the place where the

coffin was laid. The station-master immediately sent a porter to the engine-driver: "Will you tell him," he said, "to pull her up a bit; but let him not loose the whistle on us." Nothing could have shown greater consideration for the overstrung nerves of the mourners than this determination to restrain by main force the engine's whistle.

Another mourner was not so fortunate in his treatment by the railway company. He was found by a friend standing disconsolately on the platform of a well-known west of Ireland junction.

"What brings you here?" said his friend, glancing at the mourner's silk hat and black coat.

"I was meaning to attend a funeral," said the other, "but the corpse has missed the connection."

There is an operation spoken of by Irish railway officials as "checking the train." The word has really a technical meaning, and is applied to a leisurely survey of the tickets held by the passengers; but the mere outsider is inclined to understand it in its more ordinary sense. A train which appears likely to be in time

anywhere is immediately "checked," especially if it is supposed to make a connection with another train.

The ascendancy of the official class in Ireland has created a belief, very well founded, that anything can be done by influence. The usual way of bringing influence to bear is by means of a letter written to an official by some person supposed to be of local importance. I was some time ago asked by a mother, who appeared to be in great distress, to write a letter to the governor of a jail in which her son was incarcerated. It was her opinion that a letter from me would at once effect his release. I pointed out that this was not so; that once legally condemned the young man would have to stay where he was until his sentence expired; that no one except the Lord-Lieutenant could get him out. The poor mother was unconvinced. She thought that I was making excuses so as to avoid the trouble of writing a letter. The matter, she said, was a simple one for me. The result would be of the utmost importance for her. Feeling that no particular harm could come of the experiment, I finally wrote the letter, ad-

dressed and posted it to the governor of the jail, his very name being unknown to me. I offer no explanation of the end of the story. I have never been able to satisfy myself about what happened. But a week later the mother returned to thank me, with tears in her eyes, for what I had done. Her son had been mysteriously restored to her.

# CHAPTER SIX

## THE GOVERNMENT

# CHAP. SIX THE GOVERNMENT

THERE IS A TRADITION THAT AN Irishman was once asked whether he was a Liberal or a Conservative, and replied, "I don't know, but I'm against the Government anyway." This answer may possibly have been given once, a long time ago, when the story was first told. In those days the Government, whether Liberal or Conservative, was against Irishmen. Naturally we were against it. But now governments are of a different mind. Like the mothers of spoiled children they alternately bully and pet us. Therefore our attitude towards them has changed. We regard them with tolerant contempt.

An English tourist, anxious to plumb the depths of our ignorance of our own archæology, once pointed out a round tower to the car-driver who was conducting him round Glendalough and asked who built it.

"There's nobody knows that," said the car-driver, "but seeing that it isn't of any manner of use and must have cost a deal of money, I'm thinking it must have been the Government built it."

The story gives a very good example of the opinion the latter-day Irishman holds of his rulers. His attitude is scarcely made any plainer by the penetrating remark of a famous Irish wit, that the Irish problem was the necessary consequence of a stupid people trying to govern a clever one. It was the same gentleman, dealing with the same subject, who produced a particularly neat apologue. Discussing the efforts of recent governments to ameliorate the condition of the Irish people, he quoted a bill which he once received from a farrier: "To curing your honour's mule, until it died, 10s. 0d." We may hope that the end in our case will be happier. In the meanwhile the curing process goes merrily on.

Ireland is supposed to be governed by the Parliament that sits at Westminster, the predominant party in that assembly sending over to Dublin an ornamental representative called a Lord-Lieutenant and a very hard-working gentleman known as a Chief Secretary. The theory is that this Chief Secretary manages Ireland and reports his proceedings to Parliament, being more or less responsible if anything goes

wrong. In reality Ireland is governed by the English Treasury officials, the various under-secretaries and their assistants in Dublin Castle, and the heads of a number of more or less independent Irish Boards. A recent writer compared these Boards to the forty thieves who appear in one of the best-known stories in *The Arabian Nights*. He was too hard on them. Our forty Boards—there are, I believe, actually rather less than forty—rob nobody except the general taxpayer, who is fair game. The permanent officials in Dublin Castle are employed in baffling any Chief Secretary who wants to do anything and in supplying him with answers to the questions which Irish members ask at Westminster. The Treasury occupies itself in proving to the satisfaction of the English people that immense sums of other people's money are lavished on Ireland, and that we, as a nation, are dependent for our existence upon charitable doles. In Ireland we believe that the money spent on our country is our own, and that a great deal of it is spent very foolishly.

However, whether it is ours or somebody else's, there is no doubt that a great deal of

money has recently been spent in Ireland. Our Old Age Pensions have absorbed several millions, and it is generally supposed that in the scramble which followed the passing of that excellent Act we somehow got more than our share. We were credited with having deliberately gone about to swindle the innocent Treasury. They make us out cleverer than we really are who suppose that we succeeded. No one could swindle the Treasury who has not had long practice in the art of paying income tax, and in Ireland, for obvious reasons, very little income tax is payable. But many stories were told which went to show how we succeeded in doing this impossible thing. A middle-aged man, who had perhaps reached the age of fifty, was supposed to be in receipt of an old-age pension. Asked how he managed to secure it, he replied—

"Sure I knew the day that the pensions officer was coming round to look at me, and I had a real old *alibi* down from the mountains ready waiting for him in my bed."

All such stories are apocryphal. We tried to overstate our ages occasionally. Everybody,

English, Scottish, or Irish, did who had a ghost of a chance of being believed. But we also occasionally understated them, which I feel sure that no one on the other side of the Channel ever did. There was an old man who, in sending in his claim for the pension, asserted that he was seventy years of age. After a prolonged search in the papers of the 1841 census it was found that he was eighty. The pension officer, who was indignant at the amount of extra trouble he had been put to through the mistake, upbraided the old man.

"You must have known," he said, "that you were a good bit over seventy. Why didn't you say so? You'd have got the pension just the same."

"Your honour," said the old man, "I'll not be telling you any lies about it. I had my mind made up to get married as soon as ever I got the pension; but there isn't a girl in the parish would look at me if it got out on me that I was eighty."

It was not the Treasury that that old man tried to defraud.

The fact is that the Old Age Pensions Act

was to a large extent unworkable in Ireland for two reasons. Very few of us knew how old we were, and we had no means of finding out because we had no compulsory registration of births until 1864. And very few of us knew what our incomes were. The Board of Inland Revenue, which had charge of the working of the Act, was faced at the very outset with a difficulty of getting proof of anybody's age. It might have collected some very unreliable evidence from the 1841 census returns; but that would have been a troublesome task, and the Board naturally shrank from it. Some one with a genius for blundering, hit upon the idea of asking the clergymen of the various churches to certify the ages of their parishioners. The clergy, of course, had no better means of knowing whether a man was sixty-nine or seventy than anybody else had. They naturally leaned to the side of charity. If the Government was foolish enough to suppose that the Irish clergy were going to make themselves unpopular for the sake of saving a few shillings of public money the Government deserved to suffer. In the end the system of asking for clerical certifi-

A KILDARE COLLEEN

cates was abandoned, very much to the relief of the clergy.

Then we fell back, failing the census returns, on the most curious evidences of age. A woman over whose case a local committee had long hesitated finally enabled them to make up their minds by setting them the following little sum: "Gentlemen," she said, "I was the mother of thirteen children and the youngest of them was a girl. That girl has fourteen children of her own now and the youngest of them is walking. Now, am I seventy or am I not?" There was, of course, the possibility of several sets of twins in both families. Apart from such accidents the proof of age was convincing. The old lady got her pension.

Another applicant very nearly lost her pension through having been vain when she was young. The register of her marriage was found, and it was there stated, apparently on her own authority, that she was twenty-five years of age in 1870. This seemed decisive. She could not possibly have been born in 1839. But she seemed dissatisfied, and continued to assert that she was seventy years of age. Pressed to

explain the marriage certificate, she at last confessed that, her husband being eight years younger than herself, she had, to save her self-respect, understated her age by ten years. In her case some evidence of the truth of this last statement was forthcoming, but she very nearly became a standing example of the truth of the lines in *King Lear*:

> "The gods are just and of our pleasant vices
> Make instruments to scourge us."

Her daughter, who had heard the whole subject thrashed out, was immensely impressed by her mother's narrow escape. "If I'm ever married," she said, "I'll give out that I'm ten years older than I am, no matter what age himself may be."

There was another woman who offered a very interesting piece of evidence that she was seventy years of age. "When I was a slip of a girl," she said, "I was took into the big house to wait on Lady Mary, and one of the things I had to do was to carry up a can of hot water in the morning and pour it into a kind of big tin dish the way her ladyship could wash herself all over. I mind it well, for I'd never seen the like before, nor nobody else had in them

days. There was one morning, after her ladyship had gone down to breakfast, that I thought I'd try what the feel of it might be like. Believe you me, gentlemen, I wasn't the better of it for a long time after. But they tell me that baths, as they call them, is common now."

There was, one supposes, a time at which the doctrine of baths had not yet found adherents amongst the women of the upper classes. A careful student of our social customs might fix the date at which they began to "wash themselves all over." If so, on the assumption that the applicant became a lady's-maid at about sixteen, her age could be fixed with tolerable certainty. The problem was unfortunately beyond the sub-committee which considered her case. Other evidence had to be sought.

But the question of our ages was nothing to the problem of determining what our incomes were. To the framers of the Bill, men familiar with the conditions of life in industrial England, the matter seemed simple enough. A man is either in receipt of ten shillings of weekly wage or he is not. There is no room for argument or doubt. But the small farmer in the west of

Ireland is in a totally different position. Nobody pays him any wages. He lives on a little patch of land, plants and digs his own potatoes, owns a cow, which gives him milk during certain months of the year, sells an occasional "young beast" and from the proceeds of its sale pays his rent and rates. Conscientious sub-committees used to spend hours trying to make up the family budgets of these farmers. Conversations like this were followed by muddled well-meaning men with pencils and pieces of paper before them.

*Chairman of Committee*—Now, Tom, how much land have you?

*Applicant for Pension*—There's no use telling a lie about it. I've seven acres; but the two of them is cut-away bog, and what use are they?

*Chairman*—And what rent do you pay?

*Applicant*—I pay £4, 3s. 6d. and rates along with that. Them same rates is terrible high.

(The committee murmurs sympathetically. It is the general opinion that rates are terrible high.)

*Chairman*—Have you a cow?

*Applicant*—You might call her a cow.

*Member of Committee* (sympathetic with applicant, who is a friend of his)—If you saw her, you'd hardly say she was a cow, she's that old.

*Chairman*—You get milk from her?

*Applicant*—If I didn't I wouldn't keep her.

*Member of Committee*—You would not, Tom. Why would you?

*Chairman*—How much milk do you get?

*Applicant*—No more than what's used in the house.

*Chairman*—Milk is twopence a quart. Shall we say your cow is worth £10 a year to you?

*Applicant*—You will not say that. Don't I tell you I get no more from her than what's used in the house? I haven't sold a drop of milk this twenty years.

*Chairman*—You get the value of the milk all the same. What hens have you?

*Applicant*—I have four black Minorcas out of a setting of eggs I got from the Congested Districts Board, and the most of them was rotten. And I've ten old hens and a cock, and three of them runner ducks.

*Chairman*—They lay eggs, I suppose?

*Applicant*—They might lay an odd one now and again.

*Chairman*—Shall we say that you get an average of a dozen eggs in the week for six months in the year? Come now, that's putting it low.

*Applicant*—You may say it if you like.

*Chairman*—Take eightpence a dozen as the price of eggs——

*Applicant*—The hens I has doesn't lay except when eggs is cheap. Eightpence a dozen is too high, and anyway herself (his wife) doesn't sell the eggs.

*Chairman*—It's all the same whether you sell them or eat them.

*Applicant*—I do not eat them. How would a poor man like me be eating eggs?

*Chairman*—If you don't eat them and don't sell them, what do you do with them?

*Applicant*—Herself does be taking them in to the shops.

*Chairman*—Then she sells them?

*Applicant*—She does not. The devil a penny she ever gets for them, only a pound of tea at an odd time, and at the latter end she has to pay for the most of that.

*Chairman* (baffled by the egg problem)—What potatoes do you set?

*Applicant*—Maybe two roods. But I get no more out of that than what is used in the house and the small ones that goes to feed the pig.

*Chairman* (hopefully)—You have a pig?

*Applicant*—I had a pig, but he died on me.

*Chairman*—The pig was a loss, then?

*Applicant*—You may say that. I gave fifteen shillings for him after I had sold the young heifer.

*Chairman*—How much did you get for the young heifer?

*Applicant*—I got £8, and I ought to have got more. She was worth £10.

*Chairman*—Have you any children in America?

*Applicant*—I have a son, but he's married.

*Chairman*—Does he send you home any money?

*Applicant*—He does not. Don't I tell you he's married?

*Member of Committee*—What happened to your daughter Sarah?

*Applicant*—She's in America.

*Chairman*—Does she send you home any money?

*Applicant*—She might, an odd time.

*Chairman*—How much did she send you last Christmas?

*Applicant*—£2. But what use was that? Didn't it go on paying what was owing in the shops?

The committee winds in and out of the intricacies of the applicant's financial affairs for another twenty minutes. Desperate efforts are made to estimate the value of the turf he cuts from the bog, the price he paid for artificial manures, the market cost of the hay which the animal "that you might call a cow" has eaten. A long time is spent over the position of the applicant's son who lives with him. Ought the wages which as a matter of fact are not paid to him, but which certainly ought to be paid for his services as farm labourer, to be put down on the credit side of the applicant's balance-sheet? The fact that one of the black Minorca hens hatched out ten chickens last year emerges suddenly. The committee calculates the price of chickens and deducts the cost of the Indian meal which has to be bought to feed them. Their labours prove vain; for just as they have added 3s. 4d. to the applicant's yearly income it turns out that all the chickens died in infancy of a disease called the pip. In the end, after everybody has tried different ways of dealing with fractions of a penny in addition and subtraction, the amazing conclusion is reached that

the applicant has been living all his life on £10 a year or so less than nothing. This is obviously absurd, and the applicant is further pressed for some explanation. He has none to give except that he owes a good deal of money in the shops. If he really owes all that his own statements make out that he must owe, the Irish shopkeepers are a long-suffering race of philanthropists. He is, at all events, clearly entitled to an old-age pension.

As a rule the applicants, if muddled, are honest, but now and then one appears before a committee who is anxious to minimise an income which really exceeds the statutory 10s. a week. One of these, a woman, tried to convince a sceptical committee by prefacing each of her statements with a kind of oath : " In the name of Almighty God, gentlemen, what I'm telling you now is the truth. If I was put on my oath this minute, I couldn't say other than what I'm saying." The committee which was considering her case bore with her for a long time. Then a member who usually sat silent in a corner by himself, broke out against her suddenly.

"Woman," he said, "will you leave the name of Almighty God alone for one minute and speak the truth!"

He might have quoted Shakespeare with effect. "Methinks the lady doth protest too much," would have accurately expressed the feeling of the committee.

The whole business becomes exceedingly complicated when we reach cases in which the farm, originally held by the applicant, has been assigned to a son. These assignments are commonly made on the occasion of the son's marriage, and are, as a rule, perfectly *bona fide* transactions. The father reserves for himself certain rights, the use of a room or two rooms in the house, sufficient grass to feed a cow, perhaps two cows, and his own food and clothes. The Old Age Pensions Committee has to determine first whether the assignment was *bona fide* and not made with the object of obtaining a pension, then, a much more difficult matter, what the house-room, food, clothes, and grass are worth when translated into terms of shillings per week. Sometimes there is no legal assignment, nothing but a verbal agreement, quite satisfactory

to the parties concerned, but very difficult to deal with when it has to be brought within the four corners of an Act of Parliament.

Thus we struggle with the well-meant efforts of benevolent Governments, trying, I think quite heroically, to do what is right under circumstances which would baffle far abler men than we are.

It is no longer possible to discover the name of the first official Englishman who hit upon the idea of building piers as a remedy for the ills of Ireland. There ought to be a statue erected to him, whoever he was. No idea in modern politics has been so fruitful in results. Some parts of the coast of Ireland are actually jagged with small stone piers, built at various times by various Boards, which stick out from the land like the teeth of a comb. There are some which cannot be reached from the shore, many which even daring mariners shrink from approaching from the sea, and a few which cannot be reached either from sea or shore, but which may turn out in the end to be useful as alighting places for aeroplanes. There is a considerable demand for these piers, and the inhabitants of the local-

ity will sometimes take a great deal of trouble to secure one.

A petition was forwarded some time ago to one of our pier-building Boards, representing the urgent need of a structure of the kind in a certain bay. An inspector was sent down to investigate the case. He drove twenty miles from the nearest railway station on a brilliant summer day, and arrived at last at the top of the hill from which he could look down on the bay he was to inspect. Nothing could have been more beautiful than the scene before him. A broad stretch of water lay glistening in the sunshine, a picturesque village clustered under the shelter of a grey cliff. The sand, on which the waves broke gently, was absolutely golden. A boat, manned by four men, lay, her oars poised above the water, a few yards from the shore. The inspector gazed, fascinated, as his car descended the hill. Suddenly, with a wild cry, the four men in the boat sprang to their feet, flung their oars from them, plunged waist deep into the water and, with some difficulty, upset their boat. At the same moment women rushed, dishevelled from the cottages, and fell, shriek-

ing, on their knees on the shore. The boatmen waded in, dragging their boat with them. The chief man of the village met the amazed inspector as he got off his car.

"You see for yourself now, your honour," he said, "the need of a pier in this place, when them kind of disasters occurs before your own eyes."

Another idea which has had an extraordinary fascination for the minds of our rulers is that Ireland is to be saved by means of seed potatoes. Some time ago a scheme for a large distribution of seed potatoes, in a district supposed to be very poverty stricken, was devised. On the principle that far-off cows have long horns, these particular potatoes were fetched from Scotland in a steamer. With a belief in the value of its own work which is deeply pathetic, the Board, which was managing the potatoes, arranged that the steamer should land them at one of the piers which it had itself built some time before. The captain of the steamer when the time came found that he could not get anywhere near the pier on account of the enormous number of rocks which guarded the approach

to it and the extreme shallowness of the water. It appeared that he would have to ferry his potatoes on shore by boatloads. This, however, did not matter much, because, as things turned out, he was not called upon to land many of them. It happened that the Board was suffering at the time from an attack of political economy. It decided that as many of the inhabitants as could afford it should buy and pay for the potatoes, and that none should be given away until every possible shilling had been abstracted from the pockets of the people. When no one was left who could be expected to buy even at the cheapest rate, then the rest of the people should be given their potatoes free. Nothing could have been more economically sound than the scheme. The inhabitants of the district, who heard all about it before the potatoes arrived, greatly admired the wisdom of the Board. They quite admitted that every one who could afford to pay for the potatoes should do so, but each man, after careful consideration, decided that he himself could not afford to buy, and made up his mind to wait till the free distribution began. The result was that the first

boatload of potatoes, the only boatload ever landed, lay day after day untouched in the galvanised iron shed erected for their accommodation. The captain of the steamer, unable to approach the pier, lay at anchor a mile from the shore, and clamoured to be allowed to land the rest of his cargo. He maintained that his ship was in danger, lying shelterless off a singularly inhospitable coast. Still no buyers appeared. In the end, the potatoes in the hold of the steamer began to go bad, and the whole cargo, many hundred pounds' worth, had to be shovelled into the Atlantic. The inhabitants of the district, curiously enough, when one considers their original destitution, survived the loss.

The proprietor of a western American music hall is said to have had a large notice put up in front of the piano, which ran thus : "Please do not shoot the musician. He is doing his best." Something of the same sort ought to be posted in every market-place in Ireland. We cannot, indeed, shoot our Government, but we are sometimes tempted to doubt whether they are doing their best. In reality they are,

but there are moments when it is difficult to believe this. A strongly worded assurance, printed in big type, and so placed as to catch the eye, would help us to feel charitably towards our rulers. After all, in spite of every effort to improve us, we really have of late years prospered a little, and there is, according to the best judges, every sign that we are likely to continue prospering.

DROWNING THE SHAMROCK

# CHAPTER SEVEN

## THE IRISH PEASANT

## SEVEN : THE IRISH PEASANT

THE SOUL OF THE PEASANT IS ALways an enigma to the man who has suffered the misfortune of a town education, or who belongs to one of the classes of the community which earn their living otherwise than straight from the earth itself. A great gulf is fixed, a spiritual gulf well-nigh uncrossable, between the mind of the one who has been taught to look for knowledge in books and newspapers, and the mind of the other who learns from the fields, from the waters, the trees, and the living things which move among them. This is the case everywhere, and nothing is more pathetic than the efforts which our literary men make from time to time to get back to the simple, primitive emotions which make the peasant what he is. But of all peasants the Irish is, I suppose, the most elusive. Very few, even of his own kith and kin, have understood him. He has rarely succeeded in expressing himself. He is content for the most part to stand dumb while the world heaps upon him foolish blame or equally foolish praise.

It used to be the fashion in England to repre-

sent the Irish peasant as a monster of iniquity. He was a cowardly, bloodthirsty villain who shot innocent men from behind hedges, tortured helpless women, and mutilated cattle. The wheel has come full circle since those days, and a kind of cult of the Irish peasant—now spoken of as a Celt or Gael—has invaded the literary world. The man who was once a murderer by inclination is now a kind of half pagan, half Christian saint, the one witness left in a materialised world to the undying truth of age-worn mysticisms. Some one described the neo-Catholicism of the end of the nineteenth century as a creed which asserted that there is no God, and Mary is his mother. The new admirers of the Irish peasant father on him a still more ridiculous faith. He is supposed to believe in a thousand gods of earth, air, wind, water, and that Mary is the mother of them all. I make no claim to understand the Irish peasant, and I have no intention of trying to explain him ; but beyond the fact that he is, in his own way, a man of religious faith, I see little truth in most of the rather morbid writing which has been poured out upon him of late.

The religion of the Irish peasant is too solemn a subject to be discussed here. If any one wants to grasp the spirit of it, he should turn to Dr. Hyde's *Religious Songs of Connacht*. There he will find in the original Irish language and translated into curiously effective English the stories which the people made and told for themselves, the hymns they used to sing, the prayers they still say, the charms they use, even some of the curses with which they invoke misfortune upon their enemies. Some of these stories, told for the most part in verse, are very beautiful, and remind the student curiously of those which the Coptic Christians told about their saints. Many of them display an acutely critical spirit which is by no means inclined to spare the shortcomings of the Church. Covetousness is a sin which has often been laid to the charge of the Christian clergy. In this little story the Irish peasant expresses his feelings on the subject:

"There was a priest in the chapel one day, and there came in a young, fine-looking, well-combed man and stood at the door. 'You sleek lad yonder,' says the priest, 'come here till I see have you your Christian Doctrine. Tell me

how many deadly sins there are in it.' 'Six,' says he. 'Musha, there were seven in it last year,' says the priest. 'There were,' said he, 'but now we leave covetousness to the Church.'" (*Religious Songs of Connacht*, by Douglas Hyde, vol. i. p. 169).

To the same effect is the following rhythmical proverb:

"Four clergy who are not covetous,
Four Frenchmen who are not yellow,
Four shoemakers who are not liars—
Those are a dozen who are not in the country."

(From the same.)

On the other hand, we find in the same collection much plainly sincere praise of the clergy, whom the people have learned to love and respect. What could be more touchingly simple than this little verse addressed by a blind poet to his priest?

"When you lifted up your voice to plead Christ's cause,
You made sinners pause, you looked through us,
You seemed in Kilcornin that Sunday morning
Like an angel of God sent to us."

Or this, which may be set against the charge of coveteousness:

"It is Father William is the generous messenger,
Who would teach us sense and give advice.

He would distribute the world, if he had it, as broadly
and generously
As the sun gives its light in the harvest."

(From the same, p. 155.)

Occasionally these ranns touch the high mysteries of the Christian faith with a kind of reverential playfulness, very characteristic of the peasant mind. We feel that we are in direct touch with the spirit of St. Patrick himself when we read lines like these:

"Three folds in my garment, yet only one garment I bear,
Three joints in a finger, yet only one finger is there,
Three leaves in a shamrock, yet only one shamrock I wear,
Frost, ice, and snow, these three are nothing but water,
Three persons in God, yet only one God is there."

(From the same, vol. ii. p. 397.)

More solemn in tone is this descant on the old theme of the inevitable end of all things. It is the Irish peasant's version of the universal *Respice Finem*:

"The first of a ship—wood sheeting.
The first of a kiln—stone heaping,
The first of a feast—good greeting.
The first of good health—sound sleeping.

The end of a ship—deep drowning.
The end of a kiln—red burning.
The end of a feast—black frowning.
The end of good health—white mourning."

(From the same, p. 404.)

It is worth while, for the sake of giving some idea of the stark terseness of the original, to quote Dr. Hyde's literal translation of the verses. It runs thus :

"The beginning of a ship—a board.
The beginning of a lime-kiln—stones.
The beginning of a banquet—a welcome.
The beginning of health—sleep.

The end of a ship—drowning.
The end of a kiln—burning.
The end of a banquet—reviling.
The end of health—a groan."

It cannot be said of peasants who made such verses as these—and many of them are of quite modern date—that they are deficient in literary instinct. Still less that they have failed to apprehend something of the meaning of the religion they profess. I am tempted to quote more and to write more on this most fascinating subject, but I am conscious of my own inability to treat it properly. I prefer to turn from it to those more superficial characteristics of the people which require no specially sympathetic chronicling.

Besides his religious poems, the Irish peasant has many rhymed or proverbial toasts, used by

those who pledge each other. Here is one of them, characterised by a certain generous good fellowship :

"Silk for you, and wool for me, but enough of drink to the both of us."

Another gives us a conception of complete felicity. I have ventured to render it into rude English rhyme :

"Here's wishing good health and long life to you,
And the choice of the girls for a wife to you,
And your land without penny of rent to you.
If these three blessings are sent to you,
Then there'll be peace and content to you."

"To thousands of men," says Euripides, "come thousands of different hopes." One might do worse than adopt this Irish version of the *summum bonum.*

I suspect that the following toast belongs by origin to the gentry rather than the peasantry, but the hatred of the inhospitable house is less common to-day than it used to be among what are called "the upper classes." There is, whoever created it, a fine, reckless selfishness about the sentiment :

"May the devil fly away with the roof of the house where you and I aren't welcome."

The spirit of a people is very often plainly expressed in its proverbs. I recognise the results of old centuries of dealing with "the Saxon invader" in the following piece of crystallised wisdom :

"Beware of the horns of a bull, of the heels of a horse, of the smile of an Englishman."

Only a people familiar with the conditions of life on Irish farms could have expressed the value of self-help in this proverb :

"The owner of a cow should be at the tail of her himself."

When a cow falls into a bog hole the way to get her out is by pulling at her tail. It is obviously the owner of the animal who should undertake this important part of the work. His neighbours have no doubt gathered to his help and are prepared to do their best, but it is the man himself who should take his place at the tail. So with all the business of life. The principal part of it should be done by the person most interested, and no one should depend much on outside help.

The same conviction finds expression in another farmyard proverb :

"It's a poor hen that cannot scratch for itself."

The English have a proverb which warns against the dangers of procrastination: "Never put off till to-morrow what you can do to-day." But this is a bad proverb; for any one who acted on it consistently would be led into all sorts of hasty and ill-considered action, would get into trouble by doing foolish things which he would not have done if he had reversed the teaching of the proverb and taken a night for consideration before acting. The Irish proverb, drawn again from the farmer's experience, teaches the wisdom of acting promptly much better:

"Time enough lost the ducks."

Young ducks are the prey of foxes, rats, and other vermin. They ought to be safely housed at sundown.

There is a kind of optimistic, almost cheerful fatalism in this curious saying:

"What is there that seems worse to a man than his death, and yet he does not know, but it may be the height of his good luck."

The people who made that proverb were well fitted to survive evil days. They would take

the worst that could come to them with a certain resigned hopefulness which would carry them on till the sun shone again. There is, on the other hand, a cynical distrust of life and what life brings in this proverb :

"Thirst is the end of drinking, and sorrow is the end of love."

The mother-in-law joke is, next to the drunk man joke, the most popular of that small store of really humorous things by which generation after generation is moved to laughter. I do not profess to know who made it first, but it is to be found in one of its very best forms as far back as the time of Plutarch. He makes it in one of his essays, rather apologetically, I think, as if he knew it to be venerable even then. There must, one supposes, be something essentially comic in this relationship which comes into existence after marriage. Otherwise the joke would not retain its unfading freshness. But curiously enough, all the humorists who have played their variations on the original theme, from Plutarch down, have dealt with the mother of the wife as she affects the interloping husband. The Irish alone, so far as I know, have realised

that the wife has serious difficulties with the husband's mother. They made not a joke, but a proverb on the subject:

"A daughter-in-law and a mother-in-law," they say, "are like a cat and a mouse facing each other."

This apprehenson of the extreme difficulty of the situation does something to explain the postponement of marriage which is becoming a serious matter in rural Ireland. In the old days the Irish peasants married young. A small bit was cut off the parental farm and the new family started in a cottage of their own, a home easily and cheaply built. It is now no longer possible to subdivide farms in the old reckless way. When a farmer's son marries he must bring his bride home to his father's house. He has nowhere else to take her to, and no means of supporting her except the produce of the farm which will one day be his, and on which, in the meanwhile, he works as an unpaid labourer. But bringing the bride home means creating that cat and mouse situation against which the accumulated wisdom embodied in the proverb has warned him. The original mistress

of the house dislikes having "a strange woman brought in on top of her in her own home." The young wife dreads the prospect of intimate life with an old woman whom she suspects of being "crabbed." The result is that marriage is postponed until the old woman either dies or becomes so infirm that the services of a housekeeper are urgently required.

From the point of view of the woman's family there is an equally good reason for postponing marriage. The man she is to marry, though he will some day be the owner of a valuable property, is, while his father lives, simply a farm labourer without a farm labourer's wages. It is in the power of the father to disinherit him and leave the farm to some one else. Such a thing might very well happen as a result of a series of quarrels between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. No prudent father will allow his daughter to accept so very precarious a position. Nor will he hand over his daughter's dowry, an important matter in Irish marriages, unless he can make sure of a settlement in return. He demands, very properly, that some assignment of the farm, or part of it, shall be

made to the son before the marriage takes place. But the young man's father dislikes making over his land even to his own son as long as he has health and strength to work it himself. From this point of view, too, we see the necessity for the postponement of marriage.

In rural Ireland a very large percentage of marriages are arranged by parents or other friends. "Love matches," as they are called, take place, but are comparatively rare, and are looked upon with distrust. "It's seldom ever they turn out well," the people say, and they quote specific instances in support of their belief. On the other hand, the arranged marriages turn out very well indeed. Conjugal infidelity is almost unknown in rural Ireland. Magistrates are scarcely ever troubled with cases of wife-beating. The woman is generally treated with respect, and is regarded, not as an inferior or a permanently settled household servant, but as a partner, with an equal interest in the prosperity of the farm. She has an authority over her grown-up sons and daughters at least equal to, often greater than, that of the father. Her marriage may lack that glow of romance which

glorifies the awakening of passion. It makes up for the loss afterwards by the position in the home which is secured for her. The success of our marriages and the very small number of our wrecked homes has been traced to various causes. The Roman Catholic conception of marriage as a sacrament may have something to do with it, but fails to account for the equally successful marriages of Protestant peasants. The supposition of a sort of genius for domesticity natural to the Irish people seems unsatisfactory when we are dealing with a race of mixed blood. The probability is that as most of our people marry without romance, so they marry without illusion. The woman accepts wifehood and motherhood as a man accepts his profession, knowing that life is not a rose garden. The man accepts his wife without supposing that he is going to be mated with an angel. Somewhat less is expected in the marriage of arrangement than in the marriage of passion, and therefore, in the great majority of cases, somewhat more is obtained. Into the marriage of passion the man and woman rush with blind eyes, to recover sight afterwards, and with sight, too

GETTING READY FOR THE FAIR

often, disillusion. Into the marriage of arrangement they go with eyes very widely opened, and are therefore all the better able to close them afterwards when closing is necessary for domestic peace.

Courtship is no essential preliminary to marriage in rural Ireland. Very often the bride and bridegroom scarcely know each other beforehand. Occasionally they meet for the first time before the altar. What happens in the "making" of a marriage is commonly this. A man is found to want a wife. Perhaps his mother has died or become infirm. Perhaps his sister has left him. At all events he has no housekeeper. A wife is required to take up the necessary work. His father, his uncle, or some disinterested friend makes inquiries and hears of a suitable girl possessed of a fortune such as a man in his position may fairly expect. The Irishman in this matter of fortunes for his daughters is, like the Frenchman, a very good father. He may be desperately poor. He may be very heavily in debt; but he will succeed somehow in laying by a few pounds for each of his daughters. The self-denial practised is often very great,

actually marvellous. Any one familiar with Irish country life must again and again have wondered how the fifty pounds which the girl brings to her husband's home was ever made or ever kept. But in the performance of this duty an Irish father very rarely fails. If he has little money to offer he will eke out the dowry with gifts of animals, a heifer perhaps or a cow, from the scanty stock of his own farm. It is not to be wondered at that a father should be cautious about parting with a dowry for which he has toiled so hard and which he has kept so painfully. A long negotiation takes place between him and his wife on the one side and the father or friend of the bridegroom on the other. The discussion is conducted in the private parlour of some public-house, and is carried over sometimes from one day to another. An offer is made by way of dowry to the girl, and a *quid pro quo* as a settlement is demanded. A long process of bargaining ensues. Ten pounds are offered, five pounds more are asked. An additional heifer is demanded, and the request met with the offer of a pig. The whole business strikes the outsider, accustomed to other ways of marry-

ing, as a degraded sale of human beings. To the people actually engaged in it no such idea occurs. Each side is really endeavouring to make the best possible arrangement for the future of a household and family.

Neither of the people chiefly concerned is present during these preliminary negotiations. The girl is perhaps in a friend's house. The man is, presumably nervously, wandering about the streets with a companion. Once the important matter of the dowry is settled the girl is sent for. Then the man enters, and they are solemnly asked whether they are content to take each other as husband and wife. It is perhaps the first time they have spoken to each other. It is only occasionally that there has been any kind of friendship between them before. But they are generally both content to abide by the wisdom of their elders. The engagement is made.

Now and then an objection is made by one or other of the two, and when made it is respected. An Irish girl is very seldom, an Irish man still seldomer, forced into a marriage which he has definitely objected to. The important inter-

view takes place in the presence of parents and guardians and is something more than a mere formality. A young man summoned from his wandering through the streets was accompanied by his companion to the very door of the room where his intended bride was waiting for him. His friend, a man of some experience, whispered a last word of advice.

"See her walk," he said. "See her walk before you say you'll have her. It was only last week that they very nearly had me married to a girl. If it hadn't been that they differed after about the price of a cow, I'd have been married to her. They had her set out on a chair facing me, as nice a looking girl as you'd wish to see. It wasn't till the week after, when the marriage was off, that I found out that she'd only one leg on her."

The spirit of the veterinary surgeon was strong in another young man, who refused to ratify an engagement until he was assured by some responsible person that there was no truth in a rumour he had heard to the effect that the prospective bride had a varicose vein in one of her legs.

It is not to be wondered at under the circumstances that the girl sometimes finds a difficulty at first in adjusting herself to her new relationship with her husband. It is the custom in Ireland for the bridegroom to give his bride a ceremonial kiss immediately after the service. This is generally done in church, and is really part of the service. One young man put off the kiss till he went into the vestry-room to sign the register. The kiss he gave then was something rather more than ceremonial. His bride, to whom he was almost a stranger, very foolishly resisted. The bridegroom turned to the clergyman with a broad grin:

"She oughtn't to be so shy *now*, your reverence, ought she?"

The marriage service accomplishes a good deal, but it is perhaps too much to expect that it should at once do away with the instinctive alarm of a young woman at the prospect of being warmly kissed by a man to whom she has not spoken half a dozen times in her life.

When the religious service is over the bride, the bridegroom, and their friends go for a drive together. There is sometimes quite a proces-

sion of cars on these occasions, and it used to be the custom for the bridegroom's friends to drag the car of the happy couple along the last half-mile or so of the road leading to the new home. The wedding feast is a regular feature of a marriage, and often ends with a dance which lasts the greater part of the night. As many of the neighbours and friends as the house will hold are invited to the feast; and on these occasions, as indeed at most other times, the utmost good feeling prevails between Protestants and Roman Catholics.

I remember hearing of a remarkable instance of courtesy between the members of the two Churches at the wedding feast. Cold ham, cold mutton, and other pleasant things were spread out on the table. Everybody was hungry after the long drive, and, by eight o'clock at night, quite ready to eat. The hosts and most of the guests were Protestants, but there were a few Roman Catholics present. The day was Friday, and though the Protestants had no more objection to eating ham on that day than any other, they knew that their Roman Catholic friends could not conscientiously join them.

The whole party sat looking at the feast, growing no doubt hungrier and hungrier, till the clock struck midnight. Then Friday was over, and every one could eat what he liked with a good conscience. There is a story of an Egyptian hermit who once, out of consideration for a guest, broke his rule of fasting until sundown and ate a hearty meal at midday in order to keep his chance visitor in countenance. It was an act of gracious courtesy, but outdone, I think, by the delicacy of feeling which kept those hungry wedding guests from their meal until midnight.

The wedding feast is often visited by young men masked and disguised with swathes of straw tied over their clothes. They are called "straw boys." Their behaviour is very diverting to the guests. They crack jokes, sing songs, dance, and finally drink the bride's health with great heartiness. It is a point of honour to treat the "straw boys" with open-handed hospitality, and the final glasses of porter are handed to them by the bride herself.

It is considered most unlucky for a bride to enter her mother's house until she has been

married for a full month. This belief is prevalent even among well-educated people, who will sometimes put themselves to great inconvenience rather than run the risk of bringing ill-luck to their married life.

Among Gaelic-speaking people a married woman does not lose her maiden name. She remains "Una, daughter of So-and-so," but adds to her designation that she is "wife of such a one." Even where the Gaelic language has completely passed out of use a woman is known after marriage by her maiden name, and describes herself by it. "My name," an old woman once said to me, "is Mary O'Brien, but my husband's name is McNulty." She had been married for over forty years, but had not, even then, so merged her individuality in her husband's as to adopt his name. This is one of the things which ought to attract to Ireland ardent feminists anxious to secure proper respect for their sex. Nowhere else, I suppose, have women been accorded such complete equality with men as among the Irish peasants. But the Irishman, while he recognises his wife as an equal and a partner, insists on retaining his own self-re-

spect. He will not wheel perambulators, or carry sticky babies in his arms in public places. Englishmen—I judge by my experience of the northern manufacturing towns on Saturday nights—will do both these things without showing any signs of discomfort. Women, even feminists, cannot have it both ways. If they want equality and independence they can marry Irishmen, but then they will have to drag their own babies about or else leave them at home. Or they can marry Englishmen, lose their maiden names, become the property of their husbands, who will speak about "my woman," and enjoy by way of compensation the pleasure of doing their marketing while a long-suffering man toils after them laden with babies.

The Irish peasant has a long memory, but a curiously capricious one. Certain events in his past history have left a store of tales behind them. Nothing is easier than to gather stories of the famine time or the "Great wind" of 1837. On the other hand, O'Connell's agitations have left few memories behind them; and the landing of the French at Killala, an event which ought surely to have impressed itself on

the Mayo people, is only very vaguely recollected. Very ancient legends, too, of saints and pagan heroes have survived and are told generation after generation, the stories being connected with impossible localities in a most bewildering way.

# CHAPTER EIGHT

## THE BROGUE

# CHAPTER EIGHT THE BROGUE

THE LAW OF COPYRIGHT OUGHT TO BE amended in such a way as to secure to Irishmen the sole right of reproducing their own speech in print. As things are at present, Englishmen insist on trying to write down what they suppose we say. The result is a pain to us and a disgrace to them. The question of the phonetic spelling of any dialect is a difficult one. I have never been able to understand why, if phonetic spelling is used at all in reporting dialogue, it should not be used impartially for all speakers. The Irishman is held up to ridicule for saying "a cup of tay." Nobody dreams of printing the Englishman's way of saying the phrase as "a cup of tee." Yet that, phonetically spelt, is what the Englishman actually does say. The Irishman's way of pronouncing "wh" is, for some obscure reason, represented by "hw" in print. "Hwat did you say?" But the Englishman, who gets out of the difficulty by dropping the h altogether, is not penalised by having his question printed as "Wat did you say?" If we are to have phonetic spelling at all in our novels, we ought surely to have it for every kind of speaker. It is grossly unfair

that Lord So-and-so, who certainly does not pronounce English as it is spelt, should be treated as if he did, while Tom Geraghty from beyond the bog in Lisnacreen should have his remarks rendered unintelligible by being represented in print as a conglomeration of vowelless consonants with apostrophes hanging on to them in odd places, and a superabundance of h's strewed about among them.

It is true that most of the greatest masters of the art of writing dialogue have adopted the system of phonetic spelling in order to produce the illusion that the speaker is an uneducated or provincial person. But it is also true that many writers, men of inferior genius, adopt absurd spellings as a means of disguising the fact that they do not really know the dialect they are attempting to write. Nothing is commoner, for instance, than to see the word "sure" spelt "shure" when the speaker happens to be an Irishman. Yet this is an absolutely senseless thing to do. Nobody, Irish, English, or Scottish, says the word without putting an h after the s. The writer who spells the word "sure" when an Englishman says it and "shure" when the speaker is

an Irishman, simply proclaims his inability to convince his readers that the character really is Irish without resorting to a ridiculous convention. The Irish pronunciation of some of the words most commonly pilloried is in reality not provincial or vulgar, but simply an older, one might say a more classical, pronunciation than that used by modern English speakers. "Tay" is the way eighteenth-century Englishmen pronounced the word "tea." Pope rhymed it with "obey," and Pope was very particular about his rhymes:

> "And here great Anna, whom three realms obey,
> Doth sometimes counsel take and sometimes tea."

Ignorance of this fact betrays English writers into many mistakes in their phonetic reproductions of Irish speech. The Irishman says "say" instead of sea; and any one, arguing from analogy instead of knowing the facts, might easily represent an Irishman as saying a "bay" when he means a "bee." But no Irishman says "bay" for "bee." He does say "swate" for "sweet" just as the lowland Scots did, perhaps do:

> "His lady hath taken another mate
> So we make our dinner sweet."

But he does not say "fate" for "feet," though I have met more than one English writer who thinks he does. The fact is, that nearly all the Irish preferences to "ai" to the double e sound, in words like "eat," "severe," and "deceive," are not vulgarisms, but survivals. The same sound has survived among English speakers in "great," which when they were altering "tea," "eat," and the others they might just as well have changed into "greet." This particular difference in the rendering of a vowel sound gives rise to occasional confusion. Lever has a story of an army officer who prided himself on his correct use of out-of-the-way words. Being shocked at the very dirty appearance of a new recruit, he ordered an Irish sergeant to take him down to the river and "lave him there." The sergeant obeyed his order literally as he understood it, and left the man in the river. Fortunately he could swim. A traveller, anxious about his letters, asked the waiter of an Irish hotel what mails there were in the place. "Three, your honour," replied the man, "breakfast, dinner, and tea."

But the pronunciations are not by any means the most interesting characteristics of Irish

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speech. Many of its peculiar turns are the result of thinking in one language and speaking in another. The fact that Gaelic and not English was at one time the mother tongue of three-fourths of the Irish people, has left marks on the idiom of English-speaking Irishmen which even the National Board of Education has hitherto failed to erase. "My cow died on me," says an Irish farmer, relating a serious misfortune. He does not mean, as a puzzled and sympathetic English friend of mine once supposed, that the animal had succeeded in lying down on its unfortunate owner just before it expired. He is simply translating a Gaelic idiom into English. The "on" represents the Gaelic preposition "air" which conveys an idea of harm or detriment when it is compounded with the personal pronoun.

A mother returning from a walk asks one of her servants where the baby is. "He's at Bridgie, ma'am," is the answer she receives. I do not know what this would mean to any one familiar only with English as spoken in England. Perhaps that the baby, a particularly fractious and objectionable child, was at that moment tormen-

ting Bridgie in some way. In reality it is a translation of a Gaelic idiom and means simply that Bridgie has the baby.

An Englishman who had settled in Ireland once related to me a conversation which he had with an Irish servant.

"Mary," he said, "will you please light the fire in my study?"

"I'm just after lighting it," she replied.

"Then do it at once," he said.

"Don't I tell you, sir," she said, "that I'm just after doing it?"

To him that use of the word "after" conveyed the idea that she was in pursuit of the thing, hurrying desperately, as it were, to overtake the lighting of the study fire, a duty which had up to that moment succeeded in escaping from her grasp, but which she soon hoped to get up to and deal with. What she wanted to convey to her master was that she had just lit the fire; that the act of lighting it lay in the past for her; that she, so to speak, stood behind the moment when she lit it, as the afternoon, in point of time, stands behind or after the noon.

That word "afternoon" marks another pe-

culiarity of Irish speech directly traceable to Gaelic influence. We never say "Good afternoon." We say "Good morning" or perhaps "Good day." It is only the Englishman who says "Good afternoon"; and you can recognise him, however he may try to disguise himself, by this greeting. In Gaelic there is no word for afternoon. The day divides itself into morning and evening. The Irishman, even if he knows no Gaelic, cannot, without a definite effort, wish any one "Good afternoon." The phrase gives him a curious sense of uneasy disgust.

"He's a bad head to me," or "a good head to me," is another of these translations. A woman will say it of her husband, meaning in the one case that he drinks more than he ought, or in the other case that he is unusually sober. There is an odd euphemism for a tendency to drunkenness, which may be quoted here, though it is not, so far as I know, a translation from the Gaelic. "He does be a bit foolish at times," has but one meaning in the mouth of an Irishman. Foolishness is always drunkenness. The apparently redundant "does be" is another translation. The Irish verb has a tense, the

consuetudinal present, which the English verb lacks. It signifies habitual action. "I do be sowing potatoes in the field beyond," means, "I sow them there regularly year after year." The Irishman feels the want of this tense, a very useful one, when he speaks English, and has to take a way of his own to express his meaning.

"Himself," "herself," "myself" are used by the Irishman in a way which is strange to the English. "Himself" in the mouth of a woman, used as the subject of a sentence, generally means her husband. "Himself does be in town every day." Similarly "herself" in the mouth of a man means his wife. "Myself" is used as it never is by Englishmen. "It's myself would be glad to earn the money," is an emphatic way of saying, "I would be glad." These are all translations of Gaelic idiom. The common way of ending a letter in Gaelic is "Is mise do chara," or "Is mise le meas mor"—literally, "It's myself your friend," or "It's myself with great respect"—and then the signature. "It's equal to me whether you do or not," meaning, "I do not care," "It does not matter to me,"

is another translation in common use. I remember meeting a lady who had been brought up in the highlands of Scotland and came to live in the west of Ireland. She told me that the speech of the people sounded curiously familiar to her, and that many of the phrases and idioms used in Connacht were those used at her own home. This, though surprising at first, is really quite natural. The Scottish Highlander and the west of Ireland man when they speak English are both translating from the Gaelic into a language partially learned.

A good many Gaelic words and phrases survive untranslated in the English of west of Ireland people. A child is addressed as "agra," or in the case of a boy "avic." The words are pure Gaelic, and mean "my dear" and "my son." "Sleuthering" is a word in common use—I think I have occasionally heard it even in England. It means getting the better of some one, over-persuading him by soft speeches. It is really an anglicised Gaelic word. To "butter" is used in very much the same sense. A well-known Irish barrister was famous for his success in dealing with juries. He obtained

verdicts in favour of his clients in what appeared to be the most hopeless cases. Asked for the secret of his influence with the twelve honest men in the jury box, he explained it thus: "First I butter them up and then I sleuther them down."

"He's flahooly," a lady once said to me about her son, and knew exactly what she meant by the word although neither she nor any of her immediate ancestors had spoken Gaelic. Her word was a corruption of the Gaelic for "princely"; and what she wanted to convey, and did convey better than she could in any single English word, was that her son had very grand ideas, and was by no means inclined to keep ordinary expenditure within the bounds of his income.

"There I was," said a woman to me once, "sitting socar and easy." She believed that "socar" was an English word, and assured me that she knew no Gaelic. But "socar" must have been an inheritance from a Gaelic-speaking mother. It is the Gaelic for "quiet." A woman threatening a child with dire punishment for some particularly annoying iniquity said, "When I catch you I'll give you thaw mé saustha."

She probably thought the phrase was English. She would at all events have found it hard to get an English phrase which would have expressed her meaning so effectively. What the child understood was that the whipping he had to look forward to was one which it would be a solid satisfaction to his mother to inflict.

The Irish speaker of English ought to be given credit for enriching the language of his adoption. Some of his words and phrases fill long-felt wants. Of a girl with a pretty face and an attractive manner it is said, "She puts the comether on the men." The meaning is that she puts a kind of charm on them which draws them to her. The word is a compound of "come hither," and is used as a substantive. "Show," used in the sense of "give me for a moment," is a word which is exceedingly useful, but which once got me into trouble. I was an Irish boy making the acquaintance of my companions in an English school. Wanting to point a pencil, I said to the boy next me, "Show me your knife, please." He gaped at me at first and then, wondering, I suppose, at my curious request, showed me his knife. I explained myself, but

for a long time afterwards the joke was kept up against me. Things I particularly wanted were "shown" and then put away again. Yet the word is a useful word. It means much less than "give" and somewhat less than "lend," which may be understood of a prolonged loan. "Smithereen" is another excellent word which is, I believe, creeping into English. I have heard it used by Englishmen in conversation, and Dr Joyce in his interesting book on *English as we speak it in Ireland*, says that an English M.P. recently used it in a public speech. It means the kind of little bits that are lying about after a bad smash. The jug which a child drops on a stone floor is in "smithereens" afterwards. A bicycle which got mixed up with the wheels of a railway engine was described as being in "smithereens." "Galore" is another of these words. Most Englishmen understand it, and as soon as they realise its value will, no doubt, begin to use it. "Gazebo" is a word which is certainly wanted in English. It means a tall, gawky, awkward person, generally lean. "A great gazebo of a man" calls up a very distinct picture to an Irishman. It can also be ap-

plied to buildings and statues. Considering the nature of a great deal of their provincial and some of their London architecture, I often wonder how the English get on as well as they do without "gazebo."

The Gaelic diminutive termination "een" is frequently tacked on to English words, and is very useful in giving a sense of half-pitying affection. "The rain" said a woman, describing her destitute condition, "does be pouring down through the roof of my houseen." I do not think that "little house" would have conveyed half her meaning. The cottage of which she spoke was not only small, it was dear to her, held a real place in her affections. She expressed all that when she called it a "houseen." "Will you look at the fingereens of him?" said a woman who was engaged in an orgy of baby worship, and wished to call particular attention to the creature's hands. "Girleen" is common in speaking affectionately of a little girl. "Mikeen," "Paudeen," and "Noreen" are examples of the addition of the termination to Christian names. In one or two cases the termination carries with it a sense of contempt.

"Maneen" is a boy who apes the manners of a man. "Seonín," pronounced "Shoneen," is that most detestable of creatures, the Irishman who is ashamed of his country and pretends to be English. He is a "little 'Shaun,'" a little, inferior kind of John Bull.

Among the Irish words in use in Ireland which may be said to have naturalised itself in English is "gossoon." Curiously enough this is not a Gaelic word at all. It is simply a form of the French "garçon," which has somehow passed into Irish speech. The true Irish word is "gossure," which is used instead of "gossoon" in Mayo and Galway. It is derived from "gos," a branch, and "ur," "young," and means literally "a young shoot." It appears to be quite unknown in English, and has been a source of some trouble to me. I have used it from time to time in novels, placing it in the mouth of west of Ireland people. Printers and proof correctors invariably change it into "gossoon," and I have some difficulty in persuading them that I really meant what I wrote.

Some of the phrases in common use in Ireland are very picturesque. I once heard a very

crafty and tricky girl described as one who "would build a nest in your ear." The comparison of the young lady to a bird which could put moss and small sticks in your ear without your noticing it, was a high compliment to her skill. "To walk up my sleeve" is another striking phrase with very much the same meaning. A lady who was particularly good at intricate steps of the Irish jig once gave an exhibition of her skill in public. She was watched, critically, by two old countrymen who professed to know all there is to be known about jig dancing. Their commendation of her performance was, in the end, whole-hearted. "Faith," said one of them, "but that one mixes her legs well." I am not sure that his companion improved on the expression when he added, "I never seen a girl that handled her feet better." I like the expression "cock him up," which is in everyday use in Ireland. A lady was inquiring for one of her under gardeners who had been suffering severely from toothache. She asked whether he had been to the dentist. "Dentist, is it?" said the head gardener. "What call had he for a dentist? Cock the likes of them fellows

up with a dentist!" He meant that a man in the position of an under gardener had no right to such luxuries as the dentist's forceps. To say that a man looks as if "butter wouldn't melt in his mouth," is to give him credit for looking like the curates who appear in the pages of *Punch*. But appearances are desperately deceitful. Such an one frequently turns out to be a "boyo," or "a bit of a lad," one of whose daring wickedness every one speaks with kindly indulgence. There is a delightful tendency to picturesque exaggeration in Irish speech which often redeems a conversation from the dead level of the commonplace. "Would you know him again if you saw him?" "Know him? I'd know his skin in a tanyard." Can the power of recognition be put to a severer test? "There isn't a two-year-old in the country I'd be seen dead with at a pig fair," says Flurry Knox McCarthy; and he could scarcely have described the degradation of the County Cork horses more eloquently. "You may scrape Ireland with a fine-tooth comb, but you'll not find him," said the same gentleman on another occasion. An English angler inquired from his gillie

whether there were many fish in a certain river. "If you were to boil the water you'd take out of it," said the man, "you'd be getting the taste of salmon on your tea."

# CHAPTER NINE

## OLD CUSTOMS AND SUPERSTITIONS

THE ANGELUS BELL

# CHAPTER NINE OLD CUSTOMS AND SUPERSTITIONS

RED-HAIRED WOMEN ARE IN THE height of the fashion in England now, if we may trust the novelists. Nearly every heroine has hair which is either frankly red or, if the author has scruples about that, of the shade described as "red-gold." In the country parts of Ireland we are not so advanced, and still retain a prejudice against women with hair of that particular colour. We do not like meeting a red-haired woman when we are setting out to do any important work. She is a sign of bad luck before us; and if we are wise we turn back and put off the work, whatever it is, until the next day. This is inconvenient, especially for the women. A friend of mine, who lives in a very remote part of Ireland, was walking one morning along a road which led to the little harbour where the fishermen kept their boats. Her own hair was of a quite harmless shade of brown; but she had as a companion a girl whose locks even a fashionable novelist would have hesitated to describe as auburn. Her head was actually brilliant. My friend was amazed to find herself suddenly

caught by the arm and dragged into the ditch at the side of the road. There she and her companion crouched for some minutes until the fishermen had got safely past them. "If they'd seen me," said the girl in explanation, "they'd have had to turn back again. They couldn't have gone out fishing to-day. They'd have had no luck if they did." That girl must have led a trying kind of life. It cannot be pleasant to have to dodge your fellow-creatures during the early hours of every day. But a girl of any good feeling would, of course, submit to any amount of inconvenience rather than paralyse the industry of all her neighbours. And, after all, there is nothing worse than inconvenience. A girl is not ostracised or in any way despised or ill-treated because her hair is red. She stands just as good a chance of getting married as her dark-haired sisters. I suppose that the familiarity of married life in some way breaks the force of the evil spell. Otherwise I do not see how a man with a red-haired wife would ever succeed in doing anything. It would be immensely difficult to avoid seeing her some time in the morning before the day's work began.

It is not lucky for a stranger to enter a house in which churning is going on unless he puts his hand to the dash and takes some part in the work. He need not do much, but he must at least give one plunge of the dash, otherwise the butter will not come. I have never got a satisfactory explanation of this belief, but I imagine that it is connected in some way with the influence of fairies over milk. The whole business of butter-making is a mysterious one. Scientific people pretend that they understand it, and explain the curious facts that butter sometimes comes readily and sometimes will not come at all, by saying that there are differences in temperature and such things. This kind of sceptical materialism is merely silly. You cannot chase away fairies by threatening them with a thermometer. The most highly instructed dairymaid finds herself, in spite of all her precautions, baffled by the inexplicable behaviour of churns. Fairies, who still play some part in Irish life, are generally spoken of as "the people." A kindly Englishman was entertained at tea shortly after he arrived in this country by a farmer's wife, a well-educated woman and sufficiently rational-

istic to be one of the Protestant minority. She apologised for offering her guest jam instead of butter. "I have no butter," she said, "for the people took it from me last week." The Englishman, indignant at such robbery, suggested, as an Englishman would, that she should complain to the police. The woman laughed at him. "The police!" she said. "What use would the police be when it was the people that took it?" The absurdity of setting the members of the Royal Irish Constabulary to arrest a fairy justified her mirth. There is a picture in the Dublin Municipal Art Gallery in which Mr. W. B. Yeats is represented in the act of introducing Mr. George Moore to the Queen of the Fairies. It is a most amusing picture; but a companion to it in which a sergeant of police appeared putting handcuffs on a butter-stealing fairy would, I think, be more amusing still.

But the fairy of the churn is, alas! disappearing. He cannot get on in the modern creamery. The whirling separator annoys him, I suppose. Sir Horace Plunkett, who is responsible for the existence of most of our creameries, has been accused of many things. The system of butter-

making which he advocates is supposed to result in the starvation of calves, the extreme delicacy of children, and a general decay in the health of rural Ireland. It is curious that no one has yet thought of attacking him for driving the fairies into exile. This charge, unlike the others, could be sustained, and any jury would give a verdict against him if a case were brought into court. Sir Horace Plunkett tells a story about a man who objected to the founding of a creamery in his neighbourhood because he doubted whether the butter made in it would be made on sound Nationalist principles. I imagine that this man had really more to say for himself than he succeeded in expressing. In the back of his mind there was, very likely, a feeling that the application of modern machinery to an ancient art would destroy the mysterious romance of it. He foresaw a materialised fairy-less Ireland.

In Ireland we have a very proper respect for the season of Lent, and very rarely indeed does any one get married during its forty days. After Lent is over rural Ireland is too busy for marrying. The turf has to be saved then, and from

that on until the harvest is gathered in, work of every kind is pressing. Marriages tend to be crowded into the weeks between Epiphany and Ash Wednesday. The period is called in the west of Ireland "Seraft"; a corruption, we are told, of "shrift," and so related to Shrove Tuesday. Thus it happens that any one who is unmarried at the beginning of Lent is likely to remain unmarried for a year. Dr. Joyce, in his *English as we speak it in Ireland*, tells us of a curious custom which prevailed in Munster on the First Sunday in Lent. "Those young men who should have been married but were not, were marked with a heavy streak of chalk on the back of their Sunday coat, by boys who carried bits of chalk in their pockets for that purpose and lay in wait for bachelors. The marking was done while the congregation were assembling for Mass; and the young fellow ran for his life, always laughing, and often singing the concluding words of some suitable doggerel, such as 'And you are not married though Lent has come.' That particular Sunday was known as 'Chalk Sunday.'" Another similar custom is also related by Dr. Joyce:

"On the Great Skellig rock in the Atlantic, off the coast of Kerry, are the ruins of a monastery, to which people at one time went on pilgrimage—and a difficult pilgrimage it was. The tradition is still kept up in some places, though in an odd form, in connection with the custom that marriages are not solemnised in Lent, *i.e.* after Shrove Tuesday. It is well within my memory that—in the south of Ireland—young persons who should have been married before Ash Wednesday, but were not, were supposed to set out on pilgrimage to Skellig on Shrove Tuesday night; but it was all a make-believe. Yet I remember witnessing occasionally some play in mock imitation of the pilgrimage. It was usual for a local bard to compose what was called a 'Skellig List,'—a jocose rhyming catalogue of the unmarried men and women of the neighbourhood who went on the sorrowful journey,—which was circulated on Shrove Tuesday and for some time after. Some of those were witty and amusing; but occasionally they were scurrilous and offensive doggerel. They were generally too long for singing; but I remember one—a good one too—which—

when I was very young—I heard sung to a spirited air. It is represented here by a single verse, the only one I remember.

"As young Rory and Moreen were talking,
How Shrove Tuesday was just drawing near;
For the tenth time he asked her to marry;
But says she:—'Time enough till next year.'
'Then ochone I'm going to Skellig:
O Moreen, what will I do?
'Tis the woeful road to travel;
And how lonesome I'll be without you!'"

In Mayo the first Thursday in Lent, the day after Ash Wednesday, is spoken of as "Pus Thursday." "Pus" is the Gaelic word for a lip, and is used by the English-speaking people in such phrases as "she has a pus on her," meaning that her face has a discontented, disappointed expression, such as is produced by pouting the lips. On the first Thursday in Lent a good many young men and young women go about with a "pus" on them. It is quite natural that they should, for if they remain single on that day they are likely to remain single for another twelvemonth. Hence the suggestive name of "Pus Thursday."

The custom of lighting bonfires on St. John's Eve, Midsummer Day, is still prevalent in the

west of Ireland, and shows no signs of dying out. It is of immense antiquity, and comes to us from pagan ancestors who celebrated the day of the sun's greatest strength by acts of fire worship. Christianity, in its conquest of paganism, took over a great many customs connected with the worship of the old gods and incorporated them into the Church's system by giving them a new significance. The bonfires of St. John's Eve escaped this process of naturalisation and remain to-day without any religious meaning. For a week or two beforehand the boys of every street in a west of Ireland town go round soliciting subscriptions for their own particular fire. There is keen rivalry between the different streets, but the collectors of money are never grasping. A very small sum satisfies them, and the fact of having paid a subscription to one street is generally accepted as an excuse for not giving to another. It would be a great comfort if all collectors for public works would act as moderately. The money collected is spent on cartloads of turf, tar barrels, paraffin oil, and other inflammable materials. These are built into piles at the street corners, and when the evening comes

are lit. The town, on a fine summer evening, presents a most striking and picturesque appearance. I have heard of very unpopular people being burnt in effigy on these occasions, but such expression of feeling is very rare. As a rule, the whole performance is purely good-natured.

Hallow Eve is another festival which is faithfully observed in most parts of Ireland. Like the bonfires on St. John's Eve, it is of pagan origin, being the old Irish Samhain feast ; but it has to some extent been christianised by its connection with All Saints' Day. There are a great many curious sports in connection with this festival, which differ in different parts of the country, and special kinds of food are eaten. "Sowans" is a kind of gruel used on Hallow Eve in the north of Ireland. The name is really the old Samhain, which is pronounced as sowan is spelt. Barmbrack is a kind of cake which is eaten on many festal occasions, but is specially connected with Hallow Eve. Its name has been a subject of much discussion, but seems to be derived from the Irish words "borreen," a cake, and "breac," which means spotted. The reason of the name is plain enough. "Barmbrack" is an ordinary yeast bread enriched with

currants and raisins, which give it a spotted appearance. "Caulcannon," a word which is spelt in a great many different ways, is another Hallow Eve dish. Its derivation is obscure, but the thing itself is sufficiently well known. It consists of mashed potatoes with which cabbage, chopped up fine, is mixed. A lump of butter is put into the middle of the dish.

St. Stephen's Day, known in England as Boxing Day, brings the "Wren boys" to our doors. The wren was regarded in old Irish literature as a treacherous bird, and there is a legend which blames it for the betrayal of Ireland to her English conquerors. Some such idea may lie at the back of the determined persecution this bird suffers at the hands of Irish boys; but I doubt whether any of them have any idea why they carry dead wrens about on St. Stephen's Day. There are a great many "Wren boys." Indeed, in a west of Ireland town almost every boy is a "Wren boy." The supply of birds is always insufficient, and most of those who come asking for pennies on the day after Christmas carry nothing more than boxes gaily decorated with coloured paper. They chant a peculiar doggerel

when they come for their pennies, and most of them know only two lines of it, which run thus:

"The wren, the wren, the king of all birds,
On Stephen's Day was caught in a furze."

A very beautiful custom survives in the west of Ireland in the use of Christmas candles. These are long thick candles, sometimes weighing a pound. One is lit in every country house on Christmas Eve and left burning all night. The door of the house is also left open. The idea, a truly pious one, is that there should be light and a welcome in every house that night for the Son of Man, should He return to earth. His faithful people are unwilling that He should be lodged a second time in the stable of an inn. The thought in the people's minds has been beautifully expressed in a little poem published some time ago on a Christmas card by Miss Susan Mitchell:

"Day closes in the cabin dim,
They light the Christmas candle tall
For Him who is the light of all;
They deck the little crib for Him
Whose cradle is earth's swinging ball!"

A somewhat similar custom, but unconnected with Christianity, consists in leaving a saucer

of cream ready for the fairies on Hallow Eve. "The people" are supposed to be abroad in great numbers that night, and the voluntary offering of cream averts their displeasure. Irish children are warned not to eat blackberries after the 1st of November, because the fairies in their wanderings on Hallow Eve put some kind of blight on the fruit which renders it unwholesome.

A whole book might be written about the theories of disease and the cure of it, held by Irish country people. Nowadays, when the pursuit of health is one of our most popular pastimes, those who are really enthusiastic in the matter might, with advantage to themselves, pay a visit to some out-of-the-way part of Ireland. The cures we should recommend to them would be no more unpleasant, very much more original, and quite as efficacious as those of many fashionable physicians. Some of our older people display an extraordinary amount of medical skill. There was an old woman whom I knew very well at one time who knew whether a patient was going to die or not by the feel of his ears. She was never able to explain how

the ears guided her, but she was generally right. I remember in particular one occasion on which the doctor left a house after declaring that the patient could not possibly live till morning. My old friend felt the poor man's ears and then assured us all that there was not the slightest fear of his dying. His wife was greatly cheered. I, I am ashamed to say, believed the doctor. The man got better. The same old woman was very knowing in all matters relating to child-birth, and professed to be able to tell a long time beforehand whether the expected baby would be a boy or a girl.

Somes cures, firmly believed in, are of the most fanciful kind. Whooping-cough is one of the plagues of childhood. In Ireland it is called "chin cough," a curious corruption of kink cough, *i.e.* a cough which brings on a kind of confused and painful fit. A person is said to be in "kinks" of laughter as well as kinks of coughing. Before chin cough, orthodox medical science simply quails. When I was a boy, a child with this disease used to be taken to the local gasworks and made to breathe the air with a flavour of tar in it. I do not think the treat-

ment did any one any good, and it seems to have been abandoned by most doctors. They now suggest a plentiful supply of fresh air, which, I suppose, cannot do much harm, but which does not seem a sufficiently drastic treatment to the Irish mother, whose children usually get as much fresh air as any one can possibly want. She has a treatment of her own. If you want to cure a child of chin cough you go out and walk along the road with it until you meet a man riding a white horse. Him you accost civilly, and ask him what he recommends for the child. He may say anything; but whatever he says you do, and your child will get rapidly well.

A sty on the eye can be cured by laying seven thorns plucked from a gooseberry bush on the affected spot. I have not tried this cure myself; but I have known cases in which stys which looked threatening, disappeared after being treated with gooseberry thorns.

Fear-gurtha is a disease of a most deadly character which may be common elsewhere, but has not, I think, been classified and explained except in the west of Ireland. It is a kind of faintness, sometimes fatal, which comes on

people who take long walks over mountains. The name means hunger-grass, and it is supposed that a kind of grass grows in small patches on mountain-sides possessed of this peculiar quality. Any one walking over it is seized with faintness like that produced by starvation. I have heard the name pronounced "fargurths," which would mean not hunger-grass, but hungry-man. The people who have this version of the word explain it by attributing the faintness to a malevolent demon, a kind of malign fairy who attacks people upon mountains.

The belief in the curative value of a hair of the dog that bit you is still held quite literally in some parts of Ireland. A gentleman who lived in a small western town was some time ago given a present of a well-bred and somewhat valuable terrier, and arrangements were made for sending the animal to him by train. It arrived, and he wrote a letter full of warm thanks to the donor, which, in the fullness of his heart, he went out and posted at once. He was sorry afterwards that he had acted so hastily. On his return from the post office he was greeted with the news that the dog had bitten a small

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boy in the leg. Almost immediately afterwards a letter arrived from the orginal owner in which it was admitted that the dog, otherwise a very desirable animal, had one fault. "It can't bear the sight of bare-legged boys, and always bites them. That's the reason I had to get rid of him. I've paid £5 in compensation during the last month." The new owner felt acutely uncomfortable. West of Ireland towns in summer time are full of bare-legged boys. If the terrier's little peculiarity cost £5 a month in Belfast, his former home, where bare-legged boys are comparatively rare, the bill was likely to be very much larger in Connacht. In due time the father of the bitten boy turned up. He stated his case with some force, and showed that his son had suffered very severely. Then he hesitated. The owner of the dog waited anxiously to hear the amount claimed, feeling that he could not well dispute it, whatever it was. "Your honour," said the father, "it's hardly ever I could bring myself to ask it, seeing that you're a gentleman I've always had a liking for, and one that I'd be unwilling to annoy in any way, but—" There he stopped again, evidently overwhelmed by the

magnitude of the request he intended to make. The owner of the dog became acutely uncomfortable, anticipating that an enormous sum was going to be asked of him.

"But if it isn't asking too much," said the father, "I'd be glad if you'd give me a hair out of the dog's tail." The relief was immense. "Take the hair," said the owner. "Take all the hairs there are. Take the tail itself if you like." "Sure that'd be too much altogether," said the father. "All I want is a hair to lay on the bite in the young lad's leg the way no harm would come of it." "Look here," said the owner, "I set no particular value on that dog, and his licence is paid for the year. Suppose you take him home with you and keep him altogether. Then if you want another hair any time you won't have to come up here to ask for it." The father of the boy went home leading the terrier with him. In the end, I believe, the animal had to be drowned; but that was, in all probability, not till after all the hairs in his tail had been plucked out.

# CHAPTER TEN

## THE "YANK"

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THE LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION IS unquestionably a powerful instrument in Ireland, generally for evil, always for trouble and annoyance to the recipient. A leading captain of industry, who employed a great many men, once told me that when considering the characters of applicants for posts in his gift he always began by putting all letters of recommendation from clergymen into the waste-paper basket without reading them. That saved him some time, but he must still have had to wade through an enormous amount of MSS., for laymen as well as clergymen write those letters. Society being what it is in Ireland, we all have to write uproarious commendations of our neighbours whenever a post of any sort falls vacant. We try not to, but it is very seldom indeed that we escape. A clergyman, who was afflicted with a troublesome conscience, was once asked to write a letter to a very eminent man, the head of a great Government department. He did not want to write the letter, because the applicant was obviously unsuited for the post he sought. But he did not want to refuse, because

the applicant was what we call "a decent poor man that nobody had a word to say against." He bethought himself of a way of getting out of the difficulty. The eminent head of the Department had just sailed for America, where he proposed to spend a couple of months. "There's no use my writing the letter," said the clergyman, "because that gentleman isn't in Ireland." "Is it America?" said the applicant. "It is," said the clergyman, "so you see a letter would be no good." "Well now," said the applicant, "isn't it true enough what they're always saying, that emigration is the curse of this country? If so be he'd been at home, I'd have been certain of the job with your honour's letter in my pocket. But, sure, when the like of him has to go there's little good in the rest of us stopping in this country." The sentiment is pretty general in Ireland. Politicians round off their speeches with it. Poets give it eloquent expression in verses about the beauty of the Irish hills. Reformers devise schemes for keeping the people at home. But the lure of America is strong. The emigration agent still flourishes. Our boys and girls still go; although we are

all in practical agreement with the fact that emigration is the curse of the country.

The way is unfortunately made easy enough for most of us. There are a great many Irish people in America already, and they are always willing to help their relations in the old country to go out and join them. Sarah goes and somehow gets a situation in New York, earning what sound like fabulous wages. So we learn from her first letter home. The next letter brings a photograph of Sarah, strangely transformed from the girl we knew. She has a large feathery hat on her head. She has a fur boa round her neck. Her dress is of a grandeur past imagining. On her wrist is a bracelet which looks as if it might be gold. The old people sigh and wonder; but the imagination of little Molly is fired. "Isn't it better to be wearing grand hats and fine frocks than to be slobbering barefoot across a muddy yard with a tub of boiled turnips for the pigs?" The old people sigh and wonder, but Molly is sure. The next few letters from Sarah contain hints of a possible future for Molly if only Molly were in America. Then comes the fatal letter which contains a ticket

for New York, paid for and ready for Molly to use. There are tears, excited preparations, the final heart-breaking farewell at the railway station when the emigrant train steams out. Then Molly is gone from us, and we go home to elaborate once more the old theme that emigration is the curse of the country.

Sometimes, however, even the gift of a ticket to New York does not make the way quite plain for the intending emigrant. There was an old farmer in Co. Galway who was bitterly opposed to letting his last son go. He was a hard old man, who had toiled on a patch of land, lived closely, and saved. He had the reputation of being rich, stingy with his money, and exceedingly shrewd. His reasons for objecting to parting with his son were far more economic than sentimental. He thoroughly understood the value of an unpaid labourer on his farm. When the ticket for America arrived the young man wanted to go. The father refused to give him a single penny to buy an outfit. No shop in the neighbouring town would give the young man credit for as much as a pair of boots ; nor would the shopkeepers take his word for it that

the father would ultimately pay the bill. They knew the old man, and felt sure that he would not pay for anything except what he ordered himself. The boy was, as his brothers in America would have said, "up against a tough proposition." The period for which the ticket was available was passing rapidly. He had to get his clothes at once or forfeit his opportunity. After long consideration he wrote the following letter to the principal shopkeeper in the town. "Give my son Tom a suit of clothes, a pair of boots, and three shirts." To this he signed his father's name. Then by way of postscript he added, "But give him no more; for if you do, I won't pay for it, not if it was only to the value of an old sack." With this document in his hand the young man walked into the shop on the morning of the day on which he intended to start for America. The shopkeeper inspected the order, sceptically at first. The postscript, when he came to it, convinced him. It was so exactly the sort of thing the old man would have been likely to write that he accepted it as genuine. Tom, with his very meagre outfit, went joyfully to America. The shopkeeper later on

felt a new force in the saying that emigration is the curse of this country; for the old man refused to pay the bill and repudiated the written order. He made good his assertion that the document was a forgery in the simplest way. He could not possibly have written it, because he could not write.

But for all the cursedness of emigration, we owe some gratitude to our sons and daughters in America. They finance our politics for us, which is a very important matter. We should be—it is hard to say exactly where, but certainly not in our present position, if we had no one to go and make speeches on our behalf at Westminster. They also—and this is a still more important matter—to a very considerable extent finance our homes. Nothing is more beautiful, nothing more wonderful, than the generosity of the American Irish to their friends at home. Christmas after Christmas brings into the poorest houses in Ireland a shower of postal orders representing money which must have been hard to win, desperately hard to save, which no one without the motive power of great love could endure to part with.

Curiously enough, considering all they do for us, we are not fond of the Irish Americans. They come home to us from time to time, sometimes to settle down in the old country, sometimes for brief visits. We do not, as a rule, much like them either as settlers or visitors. If they come home for good and all, they put up the price of land, bidding up small holdings which happen to be for sale to quite ridiculous prices. Then they build houses which are out of keeping with our humble dwellings. Their ways of life are a continual reproach to our easy-going habits. We call them "Yanks" or "returned Yanks," and feel that we should get on better without them. If they come as visitors their conversation annoys us. They tell us of splendid kinds of life of which we have no experience. Electric light is a commonplace thing with them. They speak with familiar contempt of telephones. They impress on us that we ought to "hustle round a bit," a thing we detest doing, and tell us that a year in America would "speed us up." We know it would, but we have not yet accepted speed as one of the ideals of life. Their clothes even are an annoyance to us. They walk our

streets like Solomon in all his glory, and by the look of them even at a distance we are able to say with confidence, "Them ones is Yanks." This is all the more galling because we very well remember the Tom, who is now so lordly, cutting turf behind in the bog; and Mary Ellen, whose dresses are as if they came out of fashion books, we knew when her red petticoat very scantily covered a pair of mottled purple legs.

These are the little faults of the "Yanks." They are no more for the most part than defects of manner, unfortunate but in no way interfering with the warmness of their hearts. I have heard graver charges brought against them. It is said sometimes that they corrupt our innocence, and bring with them into our Eden a dangerous fruit of the tree of knowledge. My experience of them is different. They appear to me almost scrupulously anxious to conform to our very high standard of behaviour in matters of religion. Men who have gone neither to church nor Mass for years in the United States, attend either one or the other in the most exemplary way when they get back to Ireland.

I have heard it quoted as a fault that the returned "Yanks" use bad language, spreading the use of strange oaths in holy Ireland. But this is surely hypercriticism. Even those who have never crossed the Atlantic swear occasionally, especially when irritated. A new oath, unless it be one of quite unimaginable malignity, cannot add much to the wickedness of those already in common use.

On the other hand, the returned "Yanks," if one gets over their little peculiarities of manner, are pleasant, simple people. I remember travelling once with two very grand young ladies. Their splendour was such that but for the fact that we were in a third-class carriage, I should have expected to see their luggage taken charge of by a smart maid. At the station, the terminus of a line of railway which meanders towards the western seacoast, these impressive fellow-travellers of mine were met by an old man, very poor apparently, dressed in a shabby suit of home-made grey tweed. The two girls rippled and beamed with joy at the sight of him, and before the train had quite stopped were out of the carriage, hugging and kissing the old

man. Two days afterwards I was wandering round the outskirts of a very poverty-stricken village which clung to the side of a stony hill. I came upon the old man whom I had seen at the railway station. His English was not good. My Gaelic was scanty. But we succeeded in understanding each other, and he told me with pride and joy how his two daughters had come home from America for the summer, and had brought twenty pounds with them, which they had handed over to him and their mother. I asked where the girls were, and what they were doing. He pointed to a field beyond that in which we stood. I crossed the stone wall which enclosed it and came on the two "Yanks." They were dressed then in crimson flannel petticoats, loose bodices, and had handkerchiefs tied over their heads. They were barefooted, and were working vigorously with hay rakes. When I asked them what they were doing, they replied in Gaelic, so completely and wholeheartedly had they gone back--there are people who would say relapsed—into the old life.

There was a boy who left an Irish village for America when he was about fifteen years of age.

He was a good boy, and he got on well. Ten years passed, and he found himself in receipt of a salary which justified him in marrying. He chose a native-born American, and by way of a honeymoon took her to Ireland to see his old home. He remembered every field and every lane. He remembered every face. The fields, the lanes, and the houses were almost unchanged. The faces were different. Ten years had altered the schoolfellows whom he looked forward to seeing. It was a shock to him to find grown men instead of those whom he had always thought of as boys. In the bottom of his box he had a little present for each of his old friends. He distributed them very shamefacedly in the end. The things which he had brought were suitable to the boys he recollected, scarcely so suitable to the men he found. But, whatever our faults may be, we have good manners. The gifts were received with serious thanks, and it was not till this "Yank" and his bride had returned to America that the incident was allowed to be treated as a joke.

That young man returned to America gladly when his holiday was over. He loved his old

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That young man returned to America gladly when his holiday was over. He loved his old

home, but he was strong and vigorous. He could not have been happy without the constant stimulus of his new life. It is sometimes otherwise. A woman, who had been unusually successful in the New World, came back again some years ago to Ireland. She has stayed there ever since, preferring a life of bare simplicity to the luxury which she enjoyed abroad. She admitted that she missed in her old home much that had come to be almost necessary to her comfort. "I say nothing against America," she said. "Why should I? for I did well when I was in it. I don't deny but it's a fine life, but there's things which you earn too hard. It's better to have a minute or two now and then to yourself, and time to be sitting down even if it's with your feet in the turf ashes, than to be going from morning till night. I'd rather have a little peace than all the money I might earn out there. Sure, money's not everything." It is quite possible that this woman, out of the fullness of her experience, had learned the true philosophy of life.

But peace, though rural Ireland if anywhere in the world ought to be rich in it, is not always

attained by the "Yank" even here. A friend of mine, a clergyman, was told one evening that there was a woman at the door of his house who wanted to speak to him. He expected to find a beggar, and his first impulse when he saw the woman was to give her a small coin. She was very poorly dressed, and had a baby in her arms wrapped in a corner of her own shawl. Instead of clamouring for money she asked my friend to christen the baby for her. The request, coming from a total stranger at nine o'clock at night, was a strange one. The woman's story was stranger still. She had started from a place nearly forty miles distant to tramp to the nearest seaport town, intending to follow her husband by steamer to Glasgow. On the way her child was born, and she wished to have it baptized before venturing farther on her journey. The baby, save for the mother's shawl, which she could ill spare, was absolutely naked. My friend called his wife. Clothes for mother and babe were found, and the baptism took place. The mother was very grateful, and insisted that she would next day work off part of the debt which she felt that she owed. She was set to scrub

a floor, which was the only thing she seemed fitted to do. She did it, and then she asked to be allowed to make a cake. Somewhat doubtfully my friend's wife supplied her with the materials she required. The result was surprising. A cake of the most beautiful kind, a very masterpiece of the confectioner's art, was produced. The woman then offered to cook a dinner. It turned out a most sumptuous repast. Further questions drew from the woman the rest of her story. She had gone to New York as a girl and obtained a situation as kitchen-maid in a pastry cook's shop. She had risen to be the head cook of the establishment. She was earning very good wages, but the life was too hard for her. Like the other woman, who had mastered life's philosophy, she wanted peace and quietness. She came back to Ireland and married. The result for her was not peace, but that long tramp along lonely roads and the baby which my kind friend baptized.

"CONTINTMENT"

# CHAPTER ELEVEN

## THE IRISH SERVANT

# ELEVEN : THE IRISH SERVANT

IRISH NOVELISTS ARE NOT TO BE COMpared to the Scottish or English. We have no writer who is the equal of R. L. Stevenson ; we have certainly none who is to be mentioned along with Sir Walter Scott. He indeed, as befitted so great a man, was more than generous in his appreciation of the talent of his Irish contemporary, Maria Edgeworth. But the generations which came after have given an unmistakable decision. Scott is read by thousands to whom Maria Edgeworth is no more than a name. Yet in one single respect the Irish writers hold their own, do more than hold their own. The Irish servant, as the novelist represents him, is inferior to none. Not even Andrew Fairservice and Mistress Alison Wilson, not Sam Weller or Morgan "Pendennis" are better than Thady Quirk in Castle Rackrent, Handy Andy, Micky Free, and, to quote the creation of living writers, Mrs. Cadogan. It would be interesting—but this is not the place for it—to elaborate a comparison between Andrew Fairservice and Thady Quirk; to set Handy Andy against Sam Weller, caricatures, both of them;

or to trace to their racial origin the contrasts between Major Pendennis' invaluable Morgan and the soldier servant of Charles O'Malley. There is nothing I should enjoy more than working out the kinship of spirit in Mistress Wilson and Mrs. Cadogan. I love them both. But my business here is not literary criticism, however fascinating the paths to which it lures. The servant problem is a serious one. The dilettante amateur of letters has no business with it.

Domestic service is a great profession, but it has only of late become so, and even now it is only the rich who can secure highly-trained, delicate-handed, skilful men and women to minister to their wants. They and—since the tipping system is in full force—their friends can afford to pay for, and therefore can enjoy, that supreme, luxurious comfort which really good servants supply. But with every gain its corresponding loss. The very rich miss the delightsomeness which comes of very familiar intercourse with servants whose native characters have not been smoothed away by a long course of professional training. Every highly specialised profession destroys individuality in

its victims. The clergyman who has been a clergyman of any church for twenty years has his calling written unmistakably upon his face. He cannot escape from his clericalism. I knew one once who, ordered abroad by his doctor and strictly forbidden to do any work, tried to avoid any risk of being asked to preach by dressing in lay clothes. He bought a light brown suit, a sporting sort of hat, and a bright red tie. Confident in his disguise he went to church in Geneva. An official, some sort of churchwarden I suppose, met him at the door, eyed him suspiciously, and, after a moment's hesitation, asked him to collect the alms of the congregation. His red tie did not save him. The eye of a total stranger detected at once the fact that he had some close connection with the Church. The law has a similar effect upon those who devote themselves to it. I once went to a Turkish bath in company with a friend, who challenged me to name the profession of a gentleman who lay on a couch in the hottest room of all. He had on at the moment even less than one usually wears in a Turkish bath; but I had no difficulty at all. One glance at his

face was sufficient. I declared him to be a judge. We made inquiries afterwards from the energetic man who shampooed us. I was very nearly right. The stranger was a K.C. of eminence. Nor do doctors escape this merging of the individual in a professional type. There was one who went on an excursion by steamer and the day was rough. Most of his fellow-excursionists were prostrated utterly before the steamer was an hour at sea. The doctor himself was very far from comfortable. Nothing was farther from his wishes than to be called upon to practise his art. Yet he was called. A passenger, singling him out of a crowd of a hundred or so, walked up to him and said: "Excuse my troubling you, doctor, but can you suggest anything to help my wife? I'm afraid that the violence of her sickness—" and so on through a catalogue of symptoms. Yet there was no stethoscope bulging in that doctor's breast pocket, and the sea-breezes must have blown away any smell of iodoform which clung to him. There are, of course, clergymen, lawyers, and doctors whose personality is too strong to be destroyed by their profession. So there are,

here and there, butlers and ladies' maids who retain their individuality. But in the higher ranks of any profession these strong people are extremely rare. As a rule, we get character, personal, eccentric character, only among those who are either too young to have been completely formed, or among those who are, professionally speaking, failures. It is in the poorer middle-class families that we find the servants whom it is a delight to know, in the remote parish the parson who can completely unbend, in the half-deserted classrooms of third-rate schools the pedagogues who still continue to be men. It is perhaps more frequently in Ireland than elsewhere that we come upon the unprofessional members of the professional classes.

A lady, still young as a housekeeper, though she had a baby of which she was very proud, once gave a tea-party. Her guests assembled, and everything necessary at such a feast was prepared. The wedding-present silver gleamed with high polish, and the conversation was of the politest kind. Suddenly—the house was very small—a loud, clear voice was heard uplifted in song :

"O Jane, I say, you're telling lies—
I do not like to say so.
But what you've just observed to me
Is more than I can swallow."

The tune was that of "Barbara Allen." The absence of rhyme was scarcely noticeable. Jane was the cook and general servant in the establishment. The singer was the newly acquired nurse for the baby. There had been a discussion of some sort in the kitchen. That nurse was very musical. She sang the baby to sleep every night to the tune of "The Happy Land," and beat time on the child's back with such heartiness that the thuds of her blows could be heard all over the house. Curiously enough the child liked it, and for years afterwards would not go to sleep until some one had hit him hard between the shoulders for half an hour. That nurse turned out to be what is, I believe, technically called a "treasure." She was dismissed occasionally in deep disgrace. She left now and then of her own accord. She did nearly everything that a good servant ought not to do, and did none of her proper duties except when occasion offered save the life of the child, but I met her sixteen years after the tea-party at

which I had first heard of her, in the house of her old mistress singing another baby to sleep. Now though she has several babies of her own she is eager in her assertion that the first one she ever "cared," the boy she beat furiously on the back, was the best, finest, and ablest that was ever born. She never could have been a good servant. She was too Irish to be professionalised. She was something better. She became, and still is, a valued personal friend of her employers.

I am told that real friendship between servants and their employers is a thing of the past in England. In Ireland it is still common, and where it fails to exist the fault must surely lie with the mistress, not the maid. In a household of which I am an occasional inmate there are periodic times of extreme discomfort owing to the loss of the bunch of keys on which all happiness depends. These keys disappear of their own accord, deliberately moving themselves out of the drawers into which they have been carefully shut, and, having attained liberty, conceal themselves in the most inconceivable places. The whole domestic staff then searches for them

with frenzy, pretending to be seriously perturbed but inwardly calm, because the thing happens so often that it no longer causes serious alarm. Once, however, the keys were lost only three days after the arrival of a new housemaid. They were worse lost than usual, and it took two days to find them. The new maid was very seriously alarmed, and it was she who found them in the end concealed under the cushion in the baby's perambulator. Next day she asked for a payment in advance of wages—due to her. The sum demanded was only one shilling, and the mistress, moved by curiosity, asked what the shilling was wanted for. The girl told her frankly that during the days of extreme anxiety, while the keys were still missing, she had vowed a shilling to St. Anthony (a saint particularly trusted in such matters) if he would help her to find the keys. St. Anthony had risen to the occasion, and she very properly wished to give him his promised reward. In the case of a girl like that, one capable of a real sacrifice in her employer's interests, it must certainly have been the fault of the mistress and not the servant if there was no real friendship. It is pleasant to

relate that in this particular case a very intimate relationship was established. Years afterwards the maid determined to get married, and chose a particularly undesirable man. So close was the friendship between them that the mistress ventured to remonstrate with her. The girl took all that was said in very good part, and admitted that she was not likely to be happy with a man who got violently drunk whenever he had any money. She insisted, however, on marrying him, and explained her feeling thus: "Sure it (marriage) is before me anyway, and I may as well make up my mind to it now as later."

An Irish servant is of all people in the world the most anxious to please, and, when possible, to do exactly as she is told even when the commands laid on her are entirely unreasonable. A young housekeeper once undertook to train a cook. In the course of time it happened that there were whiting for dinner. She explained carefully the proper way of cooking whiting, and, with a view to achieving elegance as well as comfort, added that these particular fish are sent up to table with their tails in their mouths.

(The tail of the whiting is, in fact, put into its eye, not its mouth; but this housekeeper was very young.) The fish appeared on the dinner table, not seductively curled after the pleasant habit of whiting, but lying rigidly straight on the dish. Each of them, however, had its tail cut off and neatly inserted into its mouth. The inexperienced cook had most conscientiously obeyed what must have struck her as a merely vexatious order.

In order to get full value out of this desire to please, it is necessary to know how to treat Irish servants. In England a household runs most smoothly when it runs in a rut, that is to say, when every one has exactly the same work to do at exactly the same hour every day, and no one is asked to do anything outside of a fixed routine. In Ireland this kind of monotony is fatal to domestic peace. A house worked by Irish servants must have no routine. There must be infinite variety. The proper way to manage a household in Ireland is by means of series of crises, the more violent the better. If you try to get your breakfast regularly at half-past eight in the morning you will not get it from

Irish servants. It will be late, or half-cooked, or stone cold on three mornings out of four. But if you announce, late at night, that you want breakfast next morning at five o'clock you will get it, hot and good, at exactly the hour you name. If you are further able to say that you expect four or five friends to join you at the meal, you will get, without the smallest difficulty, a most sumptuous repast, with nice hot bread and every other luxury. If the kitchen chimney goes on fire half an hour before dinner and soot falls down in large quantities, an English cook gives in and you get no dinner. To an Irish cook an event of that kind is simply a stimulus. She cooks far better under those circumstances than she does when the kitchen chimney absorbs the smoke peacefully. The Irish servant invariably rises to occasions. I was once stopping in a house owned by an Irish lady and run by Irish servants. I was wakened at two o'clock in the morning by a fellow-guest, who told me that water was pouring down through the ceiling of his bedroom. I bestirred myself at once, though I am not constitutionally fitted for crises of this kind. I

found that the kitchen floor—the kitchen in this case was at the very top of the house—was ankle deep in water. I shall not soon forget the cheerful heroism of the servants on that occasion. Being Irish, they positively revelled in the scene which followed. At that ghastly hour in the morning we paddled about, scooped grimy water up in tins, soaked towels with it and wrung them furiously into baths. We salved valuable evening dresses from wardrobes which the flood threatened. We climbed staggering step ladders and spread sheets of brown paper under persistent cascades. Not only did everybody's temper remain gay, but the next morning breakfast was ready at the usual hour and, except for the extreme cleanness of the kitchen floor, there was scarcely a trace of the disaster. It is by the skilful use of crises of this kind that Irish households are best managed.

Englishwomen, accustomed to dull English methods, find it difficult at first to deal with Irish servants. In the end, if they are intelligent they do come to understand. There was one, a most estimable lady, who suffered a great deal during the early years of her life in Ireland.

She could not get the work of her house done, however hard she tried. At last she hit upon a plan. "I find," she said, "that everything goes right if you give each servant another's work to do. I now ask the cook to take the baby out in the perambulator, while the housemaid weeds the strawberry bed. The nurse lays the table for luncheon, and the gardener does the cooking. In this way everything is done well and punctually." There is an old saying that the English when they become Irish get to be more Irish than the Irish themselves. It was so with this lady. She carried her method to extremes. A friend having accepted an invitation to afternoon tea in her house, was shown into the drawing-room, in which the cook was ironing the baby's clothes in front of the fire. This was a wholly unnecessary extension of the principle.

The unconventional friendliness of a middle-class Irish household is really based on the idea that the servant occupies to some extent the position of a child or humble relative, and that the master accepts all a parent's rights and responsibilities. A girl, an applicant for the posi-

tion of kitchen-maid, was led to the house of her future employer by her father. After the mistress had been duly interviewed and many details settled, the father asked to be allowed to speak to the master of the house. He expressed himself thus : " Molly's a good girl and has been brought up respectable, and I wouldn't like now that she's away from myself that she'd be getting into bad ways, neglecting her religious duties or walking out at night." The master said that Molly should have every opportunity of being religious, within the bounds of moderation, and that he himself strongly disapproved of walking out at night. " If you catch her at it," said the father, " or if you find she's backward about her religion, take the stick to her. It's what I always did myself, and it's the best. Them ones," he added, pointing to his daughter, who was listening to the conversation, " wouldn't care what you might be saying to them. But the stick puts the fear of God into them mighty soon." The delegation of parental authority could hardly go further. A court of law would perhaps scarcely allow it to go so far. Certainly no modern master of

a household, however sorely tempted, would venture on such a primitive mode of maintaining the religious spirit in a kitchen-maid.

Another parent, this time a mother, committed her daughter to the same household with somewhat less confidence. "It might be good for the girl," she said, "or it might not, but anyway she'll get enough to eat, and what have I at home for her only the daylight." It is pleasant to think that the change of diet agreed with the girl. She became very becomingly plump when she got other food than that which her home afforded.

An Irish employer is always scrupulously particular about the religious privileges of his servants. Households are often seriously disorganised in order that the domestic staff shall have an opportunity of attending "church, Mass or meeting," on Sundays or Holy days. Sometimes the consequences of this carefulness are curious. A gentleman who was living for a time in a western corner of Munster took a country lad into his house and trained him as a valet. The young man became very expert in his duties and after awhile was taken to London. He was

full of independence and self-reliance, and disliked being treated as if he did not know how to take care of himself in the strange city. On Sunday morning he said he was going to Mass as usual. His master wanted to give him directions for finding the nearest Roman Catholic church, but the young man said he needed no help and could find his way himself. Asked how he meant to do so, he replied that he would step outside into the street and then "follow the crowd." The plan would have worked well in his native town; but London crowds are not like those of the west of Ireland. They go many different ways on Sunday mornings.

A lady, a north of Ireland woman, was on very friendly and confidential terms with her maid. On Sunday evenings the two used to discuss the sermons they had heard and other points of interest in the service. It happened once that a missionary came to preach in the little country church which they attended. He was an eminent missionary, and had been made a Doctor of Divinity by an appreciative university. He wore the handsome red cloth hood pertaining to that particular degree. He preached a very ex-

cellent sermon, and both mistress and maid were delighted with it. "But, Mrs. H——, dear," said the maid, "why did he wear thon red thing on his back?" The mistress began to explain the nature of university degrees, but the maid interrupted her. "I daresay now," she said, "that he means no harm by it, and just does it to attract the heathen."

But the days of this paternal and filial relationship between masters and servants are passing away even in Ireland. On the one hand, there is a tendency to regard the servants in a household as mere hirelings. On the other hand, domestic service is becoming more and more professionalised, and is, moreover, beginning to be looked on as a degrading kind of servitude. No doubt this is quite right. The spirit of man is a noble thing, and ought to assert itself against any employment which carries with it the idea of inferiority to any other human being. But it is a pity that the new feeling for independence sometimes asserts itself in dubious ways. An applicant for the post of sewing-maid answered an advertisement with a long letter in which she explained carefully that she thought the situation

rather beneath her, but was prepared to accept it because she was "compelled by unexpected family misfortune to try to earn an honest living." She went into no particulars about the way she had got her living before the unexpected misfortune, thus laying herself open to a suspicion which was, no doubt, quite unjust.

# CHAPTER TWELVE

## WIT AND HUMOUR

# TWELVE : WIT AND HUMOUR

THE IRISH ARE CREDITED WITH A REmarkable nimbleness in seeing jokes and, curiously enough, with a singular dullness in making them. There is a story told—the teller is, of course, himself an Irishman—of a joke made in the House of Commons, quite unexpectedly, in the middle of a particularly dull debate. The Irish members roared with laughter at once. A few minutes later the English members smiled and then giggled. An hour afterwards the Scottish members were discovered chuckling quietly in corners of the lobbies and the reading-room. They appreciated the joke when they saw it, but they had to think it over for some time first. The story represents fairly enough the popular estimate of the nimbleness of the three peoples in seeing jokes. On the other hand, the Irish are supposed to be exceptionally dull in making jokes. In the popular judgment they are people to laugh at, not to laugh with. Their humour takes the form of bulls, which though amusing to listen to are supposed to be an evidence of hopeless mental confusion in those who make them. But the genuine Irish bull may, I think, more justly be

regarded as an example of abnormal, perhaps morbid, mental quickness.

An Irish member of Parliament was recently held up to scorn by the English newspapers for a bull which he perpetrated in the course of what must have been an eloquent speech. He described the extreme desolation of a certain tract of land by saying that there was no living creature on it except the seagulls which flew over it. That was a bull of the purest Irish breed. But consider the mental process by which the speaker arrived at it. He had before his mind a picture of a deserted farm. As he spoke he realised very vividly the scene he wanted to describe. The seagulls, flying landwards from some approaching storm, heightened the general sense of desolation. He had not time to round off his sentence about the absence of men and beasts, before the birds seized on his imagination. What he was in reality guilty of was not extraordinary dullness, but a piece of impressionist word-painting too finely conceived for his audience. And this is the nature of all genuine Irish bulls.

Sir Jonah Barrington expresses himself to this effect while discussing the bulls of Sir Boyle

Roche, the most famous maker of this kind of blunder.

"His bulls were rather logical perversions, and had some strong point in most of them. The English people consider a bull as nothing more than a vulgar, nonsensical expression; but the Irish blunders are frequently humorous hyperboles or oxymorons, and present very often the most energetic mode of expressing the speaker's meaning." No one, certainly, will be inclined to deny the quality of energy to the speeches of Sir Boyle Roche. On one occasion he was denouncing the French Revolution in the Irish House of Commons. His speech is reported by Barrington. "Mr. Speaker," said he, "if we once permitted the villainous French Masons to meddle with the buttresses and walls of our ancient constitution, they would never stop nor stay, sir, till they brought the foundation-stones tumbling down about the ears of the nation. There, Mr. Speaker, if these Gallican villains should invade us, sir, 'tis on that very table, maybe, these honourable members might see their own destinies lying in heaps on top of one another. Here, perhaps, sir, the murderous marshal-law-men,

Marseillois, would break in, cut us to mince meat, and throw our bleeding heads upon that table, to stare us in the face." Perhaps even Robespierre would not have proceeded to such extremes with the Irish aristocracy; but it cannot be denied that Sir Boyle Roche displayed an imaginative nimbleness in describing the horrors he anticipated.

It was in the course of another speech in the parliament house that this baronet was guilty of his most famous bull. The original saying is well known, though its author is not always given credit for it, but the explanation which he offered afterwards for his mistake will probably be new to many readers. The occasion was a debate on a certain grant, which was opposed as likely to prove burdensome to posterity. Sir Boyle was in favour of the measure and defended it thus: "What, Mr. Speaker, and so we are to beggar ourselves for the fear of vexing posterity. Now I would ask the honourable gentleman and this still more honourable house, why should we put ourselves out of our way to do anything for posterity? For what has posterity done for us?"

A roar of laughter interrupted the speaker. He

felt it necessary to explain carefully what he really meant, and added "that by posterity he did not at all mean our ancestors, but those who were to come immediately after them." Barrington notes that after this explanation it was impossible to do any serious business for half an hour. But Barrington is certainly right in saying, à propos of this particular bull, that Sir Boyle Roche seldom launched a blunder from which some fine aphorism or maxim might not easily be extracted. This defence might certainly be put forward in the case of a bull perpetrated by another Irish legislator, a member this time, not of the old house in College Green, but of the assembly which meets at Westminster. "What is likely to happen?" he said in the course of an interesting speech. "In my opinion nothing is likely to happen. That is what habitually happens in England." But, after all, the Irish have no monopoly of this kind of wit. Englishmen occasionally make bulls. It was an Englishman, quoted by *The Irish Cyclist*, who gave the following advice about the best way of keeping the feet warm in a motor car. "There is nothing better for the purpose," he said, "than two empty pet-

rol tins filled with hot water." No one in Dublin or Cork could have bettered that bull, but Birmingham was the place of its nationality. Even the cautious Scot is said to commit himself to a bull now and then. Mr. Le Fanu records the following conversation between a Scottish professor and a small boy. "I'm sorry to hear," said the professor, "that there was fever in your family last spring. Was it you or your brother that died of it?" "It was me, sir," said the boy. Nor is Belfast, though fond of boasting of its anti-Irish sentiments, behindhand in the matter of making bulls. "We will hoist the Union Jack," said a loyalist speaker amid great applause, "on the top of the mast, and we will not allow it to be trampled under foot by the hands of any man."

Genuine delicacy of feeling and an instinctive dislike for getting another man into a difficult position was responsible for the following very confused bull. A gentleman, at dinner in an hotel, said to a friend who was sitting beside him:

"I'm nearly sure that that's an old college chum of mine sitting at table at the opposite side of the room."

"Then why don't you go and speak to him?"

"I'm afraid to; for he's so very shy that he would feel quite awkward if it turned out to be another man after all."

A tendency to produce bulls is not, however, the only characteristic of Irish wit. Most observers have noticed an extreme readiness in reply and repartee, especially among the less educated classes. A charitably inclined Irish nobleman, a bachelor of seventy years or so, used to allow the poor people of his neighbourhood to roam through his demesne gathering sticks and broken wood for their fires. The only condition he made was that no growing trees were to be cut, or shrubs broken. His kindness was occasionally abused; and he was greatly irritated one day to find an aged crone deliberately tearing branches from some rare and valuable ornamental shrubs.

"Come along with me," he said, "come with me to the gate and I'll give orders to the lodge-keeper that you are not to be admitted again."

"Let your lordship go in front of me," said

the withered old woman, "and I'll follow you."

But his lordship, suspecting a scheme for escape, would not agree to this.

"No, no," he said, "come along with me. Walk beside me."

"Arrah, don't make me do the like of that," said the old woman. "Sure what would my character be worth after, if I was seen walking about the demesne with an unmarried man like yourself?"

In such coin she paid for breaking the branches and escaped punishment.

I remember getting a very smart answer once from a labourer at the side of the road. Pipes for the transmission of a new water supply were being laid down in the streets of a town, and the usual plugs and traps were being fitted at regular intervals so that the water might be available in case of fire. The labourer, when I accosted him, was engaged in fitting one of these plugs outside the gate of a cemetery. There was no house near it, and as a precaution against fire it seemed to be superfluous, since tombstones do not burn easily. I pointed this out to the man,

and was inclined to laugh at his useless labour. He looked up at me with a half smile, and pointing to the cemetery replied :

"I don't know, your honour, but maybe some of them in the inside would be glad enough of a drop of cold water now and again."

Mr. Mecredy relates a story of a reply made to a member of the British Association, then visiting Dublin, by an Irish glazier. The Englishman complained to a brother scientist, an Irishman, that although he had been three days in Ireland he had not come across a single example of Irish wit. A glazier was at work on a broken window near at hand. The Irish scientist pointed him out.

"Go up to that man," he said, "make some criticism of the way he's doing his work and see what answer you'll get."

The Englishman acted on the advice.

"My good man," he said, "if you don't use more putty you'll not be able to put in that pane."

"If you don't get away out of that," said the man, "I'll put a pain into you that won't need any putty at all." The repartee was rude, but effective.

For another rude, but well deserved, reply a railway guard is responsible. A lady, travelling alone, had succeeded in filling every unoccupied seat in a first-class compartment with her luggage. She declined to move any of it in order to allow another traveller to enter the carriage. He appealed to the guard, who remonstrated with the lady on the unreasonable selfishness of her conduct. The lady replied to him with great hauteur. "Do you know," she said, "who you're speaking to?"

"I do not, ma'am," said the guard, "but whoever you are you can't have the whole carriage to yourself."

"Let me tell you," said the lady, "that I'm one of the Directors' wives."

"I can't help it, ma'am," said the guard, "and it wouldn't make a ha'porth of difference if you was his only one."

A somewhat similar retort was made by a shop assistant in a provincial town to a high and mighty dame who required to have an outrageous number of articles sent to her house on approval. The shop assistant, bowing before the lady's carriage, which she was too

proud or too lazy to leave, apologised for not being able to do as she asked.

"Do you know who I am?" she said, "I'm the bishop's lady."

"I'm very sorry, ma'am," said the shop assistant, "but I can't do it, not if you was his wife."

Equally well deserved was the severe reply made by an Irish peasant who was being chaffed by a smiling English tourist in the irritatingly stupid manner common to his kind.

"If the devil was to come here now," said the tourist, "which of us do you think he'd take, you or me?"

"He'd take me," said the peasant.

"Why do you think so?" said the Englishman.

"Because he'd be sure of your honour any time," was the reply.

Mr. S. M. Hussey, in his book of Irish reminiscences, has an excellent story of an answer given by a policeman to an old lady who inquired where she would find the particular tram she wanted to take her to Blackrock. She was standing at the time in the middle of the street

near Nelson's Pillar, the place to which nearly all the Dublin trams converge and from which they start.

"In one moment, ma'am," said the policeman, "if you haven't moved out of that, you'll find it in the small of your back."

I have never been able to satisfy myself whether an answer given to a friend of mine was an instance of very conscientious accuracy or of a refined form of wit. My friend was driving on a very dark and wet night to a village called Killiskey. He met a man walking on the road and stopped him.

"Would you mind telling me," he said, "how far off is Killiskey?"

The man made no answer for some time. He was reckoning the distance carefully. At length he replied:

"I'd say now that it's not more than five or six perches."

My friend had actually reached the beginning of the village street when he was making the inquiry.

It was, however, not cynical wit but the confusion occasioned by nervousness on a very

important occasion which led a Belfast labourer to attempt a new version of the familiar marriage vow. The clergyman said aloud the words "with all my worldly goods I thee endow," and directed the bridegroom to say them after him. The man, looking the bride straight in the face and speaking in a firm voice said, "with all my goodly words I thee endow." Alas! that so many women have found themselves endowed with little else. One poor bride came to the same clergyman to be married. The bridegroom was plainly very drunk and the clergyman refused to perform the ceremony.

"Take him away," he said, "and bring him back again when he's sober.

"But, please your reverence," said the woman, "when he's sober he won't come."

She, one suspects, would have been endowed with words which were anything but goodly if she had succeeded in carrying out her intention of marrying the man while he did not know what he was doing.

Stories connected with drinking are unfortunately far too common, but the severest moralist will scarcely deny that some of them have

the redeeming quality of wit. It is related of an Irish member of Parliament that he once walked up to an Englishman in the lobby of the House of Commons and said, without provocation, "You're a fool."

"Sir," said the Englishman, "you must be drunk."

"I may be," said the Irishman, "but I'll be sober to-morrow, whereas you'll be a fool then too."

In the days when temperance reformers used to wear little blue ribbons in their button-holes as outward and visible signs of the faith that was in them, a Dublin car-driver was discovered somewhat drunk with an enormous blue ribbon prominently displayed on the lappet of his coat. Asked why he wore the badge, he replied that he did so in order to tempt wicked gentlemen to offer him drinks. His condition was a valuable testimony to his acute knowledge of human nature. It was, I think, a north of Ireland gentleman who received a sample bottle of a new kind of sherry, guaranteed to be an effective preventative of gout. He replied to the sender in the following brief letter:

"Dear Sir, I have tried your sherry, and prefer the gout."

Another north of Ireland gentleman heard from the lips of a clergyman of the death of an inveterate enemy of his who had harassed him for many years.

"Well," he said, "it's a comfort to think that the devil's got that fellow at last."

The clergyman, being a clergyman, felt bound to protest against this uncharitable view of the dead man's condition. He insinuated a hope that, in spite of all that had passed, the poor man might have escaped the extreme penalty.

"Well," said the other, "if the devil hasn't got that fellow, all I can say is that I don't see much use in our keeping a devil at all."

The following conversation shows a more tolerant feeling for the infernal regions. It is supposed to have been overheard during the Fenian times, when Ireland was in a particularly troubled state. Mr. Le Fanu reports it thus:

"*Tom*: These are terrible times, Bill.

"*Bill*: Bedad, they are, Tom. It's a wonder if we'll get out of the world alive.

"*Tom*: I'm afeard we won't, even if we had as many lives as Plutarch.

"*Bill*: If Oliver Cromwell could only come up out of hell he'd soon settle it.

"*Tom*: Maybe he'd rather stop where he is."

According to Tom, the change would be from comparative quiet and comfort to a disagreeable uproar.

But it is only Irishmen who are allowed to say these very hard things about their country. We resent them bitterly when they come from the lips of strangers; just as a mother who smacks her own boy heartily will not allow any one else to touch him save in the way of kindness. All Irishmen whom I have ever met cherish in their hearts a deep affection for Ireland. We make and repeat sayings to the discredit of our home—"Ireland is a very good country to live out of," and so forth, but in reality we are never contented and happy for very long elsewhere. And there is, in spite of our many differences and our violent political quarrelling, a bond of union between us which residence in a foreign land strengthens and brings to recognition.

One of the best of our contemporary poets has described us very well in a single line as—

"Leaping to greet at a distance, set in the death-grips at home."

# CHAPTER THIRTEEN

## SPOIL FIVE

# CHAPTER THIRTEEN SPOIL FIVE

I AM, RECKONING FROM MY OWN STANDpoint, no more than middle-aged, and yet I have seen a great change come over Irish life. As a man of some patriotic feeling, I acknowledge that it is a change for the better. As a lover of bright and stimulating national characteristics, I regret it. We have forgotten how to play Spoil Five. Once the game was widely popular. You played it in presbyteries in Donegal. You played it in the shabby lodgings of medical students up for their terms in Dublin. You played it of an evening in the low-ceilinged parlours of Connaught Squireens. You found its votaries in the Midlands, in Cork, in Kerry. Now it is played no more. Its rules are forgotten, or only survive confusedly in the memories of men who have long ago deserted it, becoming cosmopolitan in spirit and playing Bridge. I had some skill in the game once ; but to-day, so long is it since I have met a player, I can only with an effort recollect the ways of it. Yet it was a great game, and, I think, truly national, a reflection of the spirit of Ireland in the days of its popularity, a spirit waning now. No one except an Irishman

could ever have played Spoil Five really well; for no one else lived the life which Spoil Five expressed as in a parable.

The value of the cards was gloriously confusing to the beginner. The highest in a red suit took the trick, the lowest in a black. The humble deuce of spades triumphed unexpectedly over an opulent ten; but the ten of diamonds lorded it in the familiar way over subservient threes and fours. Just so in actual life. Values in Ireland were bewilderingly uncertain to the strangers within our gates. That man is to be pardoned who said despairingly, "Facts! There are no facts in Ireland." He was wrong, of course. There are facts in Ireland as elsewhere. The two of spades does consistently and always beat the ten though his victory seems to be a reversal of all the laws of nature. The nine of diamonds always gets the better of the six. The rule which decides the value of the cards looks confusing, and may be condemned as wholly arbitrary and ridiculous. It was really a reflection of the ways of Irish life during the last century. To us who lived the life, the rule seemed natural enough. We expected some twos to beat some tens. We

should have been surprised if they had not; because all around us the race was occasionally to the swift and the battle to the strong, but quite as often the sluggard took the prize and the feeble waved the sword of final triumph.

There was also a peculiar honour accorded to the knave. The knave of a plain suit was no more than he should be, the inferior of kings and queens. But when his party came into power and he found himself one of the dominant trump class, he leaped into unexpected prominence. The knave of trumps led captive his own king, and trampled his queen as dirt beneath his feet. Again we recognise a mirror of our life. Solid worth counted in the days of trouble and adversity. The best and strongest led the squadrons of reforming oppositions. But the wheel came full circle at last. In great affairs or village politics the turn of the opposition arrived. It became the government. Then it was the knave who got the honours and the prizes, the knave who ruled. Kings, queens, and common cards alike bowed down to him.

All of them except the five of his own suit. This favoured creature, paltry and inconsider-

able in the days when he was not a trump, claimed and took absolute leadership when his party was in power. There was no accounting for his prominence. The knave rose high on the wave of fortune because he was a knave. Such things happen everywhere. Only in Ireland, I suppose, did quite commonplace people, unhelped even by any special skill in knavery, find themselves in a position now and then to patronise all the rest of the pack. There was something delightfully stimulating in such possibilities. We cannot all be kings and queens. We have, some of us, a prejudice against being knaves; but the most mediocre man may without vanity reckon himself a five. What splendid chances our old game, our passing ways of national life, offered to us!

Yet the game would have been but an imperfect counterpart of our life if it had not provided a special position for the ace of hearts. No change of government affects his power. It is not the highest. The trump ace beats him and the trump knave and the five. But his strength is very great and is unchangeable. Having him safely on your side, you viewed with comparative indifference the turn of the trump card. He is

THE LATEST NEWS

the high permanent official, civil or ecclesiastical. Whatever government may come into office, his power endures. He does not care for showy splendour. Lords-Lieutenant make State entries. Chief Secretaries' names are graven on the perishable pulp of linotype machines. They are the trump aces and the trump kings, the creatures of a day. Behind them, unobtrusive but strong as death, lowered the ace of hearts, the bishop or the Vice-President of the Board. Here again the game was confusing to a stranger. Accustomed to the unquestioned rule of the trump suit, the dominance of the party in power, he could not understand how it was that in Ireland the sentimental Radical could not sentimentalise satisfactorily, or the reactionary Conservative react to the full scope of his desire. We who played Spoil Five, when Spoil Five was a national game, understood. The most sympathetic sentimentalist was stopped in mid-career, the most determined reactionary was checked by the persistence of the unchanging ace of hearts.

These curious card values were a great feature of the old game; but its fascination did not

lie wholly in them. It was a game played for a pool. It was conceivable that no one would ever win the pool. A party might sit down to Spoil Five and play for hours and hours. It was quite possible that every one of the party might get poorer and poorer all the time, that nobody would win. The pool indeed grew and kept on growing, a dazzling prize; but the pool was nobody's property. Each player contributed to it, shilling after shilling, up, perhaps, to the last shilling that he owned. Each player did all that in him lay to prevent any other winning it. He was content to part with his own property. He could not bear to see another get it. The game was always a fight to prevent other people winning. No wise player ever admitted by his style of play that he had any expectation of winning himself. Hard-headed, shrewd Anglo-Saxons do not play such games, or, if they play, do not excel in them. We played Spoil Five with extraordinary skill. We all played life and politics in the same spirit; or used to play them so in the days when Spoil Five was popular. We contributed shilling after shilling contentedly enough so long as no

one won. When the prize seemed to be coming within the grasp of some individual we united against him.

The rapidly shifting alliances and enmities of the game always particularly delighted me. In other games, friendships are more enduring, or perhaps no friendships are formed at all. In Whist and Bridge a partnership lasts for a rubber at least. It becomes, as hand after hand is played, a firmly knit friendship. Enmities are equally fixed and enduring. There is a comfortable confidence from beginning to end that your partner will do the best he can for you through good luck or bad. He never deserts you. You can count on him. He will rejoice when you rejoice and weep when you weep. In Nap you play as an Ishmael, every man's hand against you, yours against the world. The friendships in that game, the alliances against the player who has openly backed himself to win, endure until the cards are dealt again. But in Spoil Five swift alliances were formed and dissolved. Your most dangerous enemy became by the turn of a card your most valued friend. For two tricks you trusted the man on your

right, suspected him of no evil design, played up to him, helped him in every way, for you and he were bent on the defeat of some third player whom you both suspected of hoping to win. Then at the next trick the alliance broke up. Your former enemy, whose ambitions your skill had baulked, became your friend. You and he turned with the utmost ferocity upon your former ally. Nothing in the game, nothing in the old Irish life, was more exciting than these kaleidoscopic changes. They added a zest to effort unknown to the sober Bridge player, foreign to the very nature of the Anglo-Saxon of whom a kindly satirist has written, that

"Every little boy or girl who's born into the world alive
Is either a little Liberal or else a little Conservative."

With our traditions of public life we can never, I suspect, become a nation of great Bridge players. We once were, and still might be, the most skilful people in the world at Spoil Five.

Why have we let the game pass into oblivion? It was surely worth preserving if only for the sake of the way its rules encouraged the art of keeping a card up your sleeve. In other games, in Bridge or Whist, there is a certainty

that under favourable circumstances you can draw your adversary's ace of trumps. He wins with it, of course, but once he has won its trick the thing is gone. You need fear it no longer. Your way is clear before you. No hidden dangers can exist for you. But in Spoil Five it was possible to hold off certain cards. The skilful player refused to have them drawn, kept the strength of his hand concealed trick after trick, burst upon you with overwhelming force just when it seemed certain that he was helpless. There was an immense joy in doing this. There was also an ever-present dread that it would be done to you. Those games are comparatively dull in which no such strategy is possible. Life in a country where men do not hold off their cards is a tame and unexciting thing. We knew a better way.

I suppose we are changing our natures and mending our ways. Irish life is at last becoming obvious, reasonable, Saxon. It is hard to believe that we can ever really be content to live without that most fascinating of all inconsistencies, the beating of some tens and nines by some threes and twos. Are we going to deny

our knaves their chance of sudden splendour and condemn our fives to perpetual inglorious mediocrity? We have forgotten how to play Spoil Five, and our desertion of the game seems evidence that we are forsaking all that the game expressed. But surely no Irishman, in his inmost heart, desires to curtail the privileges and powers of the ace of hearts, the permanent officials of Church or State, bishops or Vice-Presidents? In the evil days of protest against the will of some shameful faction, it used to be a solid comfort to feel that at the last resort the Local Government Board would send an inspector down; or amid the confused alarms of party skirmishes to flourish in the face of adversaries an episcopal pronouncement. Now, with the increasing popularity of Bridge, Nap, and such games there seems a general tendency to curtail the glories of the ace of hearts, and to let him take his ordinary place among the other cards, to subject him like them to time and chance.

It is all for the best, no doubt, this flattening of our old characteristics under the hammer of democratic rationality. But there will be

some who mourn the change ; and many, no doubt, who will part most reluctantly at least with the privilege of holding up their best cards until the psychological moment when the dumping of them down secures the pool.

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